

Expats share ups, downs of moving, living abroad

First-timers suggest that people considering a move do a trial run. **In Money**

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Get your calendars ready, booklovers, so you don’t miss out on genre-spanning titles. **In Life**



TOP: JOE RONDONI/USA TODAY NETWORK; BELOW: BRETT DAVIS/IMAGN IMAGES

Playoff semifinal matchup heating up

Penn State, with Coziah Izzard, and Texas, with Quinn Ewers, advance after winning their bowl games over New Year holidays. **In Sports**

USA TODAY

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E2

New year brings new laws to states

Changes affect guns, sentencing, social media

Kinsey Crowley, Tom Ackerman, Rebecca Powell, C. A. Bridges, Mark Robison and Charles Dunlap

USA TODAY NETWORK

As we turn the corner into 2025, federal policies are sure to change when President-elect Donald Trump is sworn into office this month.

But many states have new laws taking effect now. During legislative sessions in 2024, lawmakers passed laws to tackle topics as diverse as egg sales and social media bans for minors.

Gun safety activists have touted a wave of newly passed laws aimed at educating consumers on the risks associated with gun ownership and securely storing firearms. Meanwhile, several new laws are aimed at tackling crime with harsher sentences, continuing a rollback of criminal justice reform that has been unraveling for the past couple of years.

Here is a look at some laws that went into effect Jan. 1.

Gun laws

● **California** passed a package of laws strengthening gun safety regulations, including a law that requires customers to receive pamphlets about the reasons for and risks of firearm ownership. The state now classifies hate-based threats as a consideration for a gun violence restraining order.

● **Colorado** now requires that any handgun in an unoccupied vehicle must be locked in a hard-sided container out of plain view, and the vehicle also must be locked, with some exceptions. Beginning in July, the state will require an eight-hour training class for anyone who wants to apply for a concealed-carry permit.

● **New Hampshire** is strengthening gun rights. The state is bolstering privacy protections around gun laws by prohibiting the use of specific merchant category codes, a piece of NRA-backed legislation found in more than a dozen other states. New Hampshire is also barring employers from forbidding employees from storing guns in locked vehicles.

Crime and punishment

As crime rates fall back to pre-pandemic levels, states have taken different approaches to public safety policy.

● **California** now imposes harsher sentences for large-scale “smash-and-grab” retail theft.

● **New Hampshire’s** bail reform allows some criminal suspects to be held longer. The majority of this legislation went into effect Wednesday.

● **Washington** now allows harsher penalties for negligent driving in cases that include a fatality.

● **Illinois** now requires police to undergo autism awareness training, and the Adult Redeploy Illinois Oversight

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What 2025 holds, from award shows to trials

A look at the notable people and events folks will be talking about. **3A**

New Orleans ramming called act of terrorism



Investigators work on Bourbon Street in New Orleans after an armed truck driver barreled into a crowd early Wednesday. The FBI said it was investigating the case as a terrorism attack. MICHAEL DEMOCKER/GETTY IMAGES

At least 10 killed when truck drives into New Year’s revelers



The driver started firing on police officers from inside the vehicle moments after striking the crowd, New Orleans police said. Two officers were wounded, they said, and the driver was shot and killed. MARC WEISZER/USA TODAY NETWORK

Darren Samuelsohn, Bart Jansen, Claire Thornton and Michael James

USA TODAY

An armed man drove a truck into a New Year’s Eve celebration on Bourbon Street in New Orleans’ French Quarter early Wednesday, killing at least 10 and injuring more than 30 before being fatally shot by police in what the FBI is calling a terrorist assault.

“We are working with our partners to investigate this as an act of terrorism,” the FBI said in a statement.

The pickup crashed into the crowd at high speed around 3:15 a.m., and within moments the driver started firing on police from inside the vehicle, New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said. Two officers were shot and were in stable condition.

Police confirmed with USA TODAY that the driver was killed by police.

“Perpetrator was shot by NOPD officers and killed,” said Karen Boudrie, public relations specialist with New Orleans police.

The suspect has been preliminary identified by the FBI as Shamsud Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old U.S. citizen and Army veteran who lived in Texas.

FBI special agent Alethea Duncan

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“He was hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did. ... This man was trying to run over as many people as he possibly could.”

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell

More inside

● Ramming incidents becoming more common, **6A**

● Sugar Bowl postponed, **1C**

‘Bridge pups’ find loving homes in the USA



“I don’t check dogs’ papers before I offer assistance or compassion,” says Ruby Montana, founder of Bridge Pup Rescue in El Paso, Texas. PROVIDED BY RUBY MONTANA

Rescuers, border agents extend welcoming hands

Lauren Villagran

USA TODAY

EL PASO, Texas – They crossed the U.S.-Mexico border like beggars – tired, hungry and alone. They had no papers or names.

That was, until bighearted border officers took in these destitute immigrants, who found new lives in America as Selma and Lieu, Petunia and Peanut, Cupid, Penelope, Selena and Floyd.

This border city, sometimes called the Ellis Island of the Southwest, has long been known for its generosity to immigrants, and that spirit extends to newcomers on four legs.

For 12 years, a Borderland nonprofit called Bridge Pups Rescue has helped

foster and adopt these accidental migrants into loving homes in the USA.

Founder Ruby Montana rescued her first “bridge pup” after her brother became a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer in their hometown more than a decade ago. He noticed strays wandering over the international bridge from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, into El Paso.

“They were usually in terrible condition, starving or limping or covered in fleas and ticks,” she said. “He would hide them; I would pick them up and find them fosters. When we got caught, we were scared the other agents were going to be angry, but they were totally on board. It became unofficial protocol.”

Technically, even dogs need documentation to cross into the U.S. legally. CBP enforces the rules set by the Department of Agriculture’s Animal and

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Police and fire personnel in Yarmouth, Mass., respond to the scene of a two-car crash Nov. 20. About 40,000 Americans die in traffic accidents every year. STEVE HEASLIP/USA TODAY NETWORK

# 40 years after New York law, seat belts are ‘part of culture’

Compliance has climbed to nearly 92% nationwide

Jorge L. Ortiz  
USA TODAY

Forty years ago Wednesday, New Yorkers became the first car occupants in the U.S. to face penalties for not buckling up, so large numbers started fastening their seat belts. Through some starts and stops along the way, the rest of the nation followed suit.

Seat belt use in New York state rose from 16% to 57% in the first four months the law was enforced after it was implemented Dec. 1, 1984, with a one-month grace period that postponed fines of up to \$50 until the new year.

By the end of 1985, as the federal government provided funding incentives, nearly all state legislatures had introduced a mandatory seat belt law for adults, and 14 of them had passed bills, according to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Today, compliance with seat belt requirements has climbed to nearly 92% nationwide, and New Hampshire is the only state that doesn’t require their use at least for the driver and front-seat passengers, the subjects of the initial laws. In addition, 29 states and Washington, D.C., also demand rear-seat passengers “click it or ticket.”

**More than 800,000 lives saved**

A study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration showed that from 1968 through 2019, the agency’s safety standards prevented more than 860,000 deaths on the road, in addition to 49 million nonfatal injuries. Nearly half of the saved lives were attributed to seat belts.

“The research shows that technologies such as seat belts, air bags, electronic stability control, improved brakes and many other safety features are saving lives as intended,” NHTSA Deputy Administrator Sophie Shulman said in statement.

Ten years after New York Gov. Mario

Cuomo – a strong advocate for seat belts – signed his state’s landmark legislation, observational surveys showed 58% of Americans in passenger vehicles buckled up, and the figure has mostly risen steadily since then.

That may obscure the initial rejection of the safety restraints. A Washington Post story in July 1984 noted a new poll revealed 65% of respondents opposed laws such as the one New York approved.

Joseph Schofer, a professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern University who specializes in transportation, told USA TODAY the increased compliance is much more the result of educational campaigns than strict enforcement, which has dwindled over the years.

**The role of schools, doctors and the media**

Schofer credits teachers, pediatricians and media messaging with underscoring the importance of car restraints for children and adults.

“It has become part of the culture, and I think you can attribute it to doctors and schools and all kinds of messaging that get into people’s heads, and they grow up and remember that,” said Schofer, who has served on national and Chicago-area transportation committees. “The kids in some family situations will be the ones who say ‘I have to wear my seat belt’ or ‘You have to wear your seat belt.’”

Despite the progress, adherence to seat belt mandates in the U.S. lags behind what’s common in European countries, especially the likes of Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands, where enforcement is stricter and compliance rates are in the 95% to 98% range, Schofer said.

Regulations for seat belt use in the U.S. fall under the jurisdiction of states, and 35 of them have what are known as primary laws, which allow law enforcement officers to issue a citation to an unbuckled driver or passenger without another offense being involved. In the 14 states with secondary laws, unre-

strained occupants can be ticketed only if another traffic infraction has been committed.

That partially limits enforcement in a country with a strong ethos of personal freedom. Schofer said he recently worked on a study that indicated much of the resistance to traffic laws stems from such a culture. “The opposition I hear is, ‘I don’t want the government telling me what to do,’” he said. “The subtext of that is, ‘I’d rather kill myself than listen to good advice.’”

**Fatal decision not to buckle up**

The consequences can indeed be fatal. NHTSA said about half of the more than 25,000 people killed in passenger vehicles in 2022 were not wearing a seat belt, a remarkable figure considering the low percentage of unbuckled drivers and passengers.

The number of Americans killed in all vehicles yearly typically hovers around 40,000. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, drivers and passengers on the front seat who use their shoulder and lap belts reduce their chances of dying in a car crash by 45% and by 60% if riding in an SUV, van or pickup.

Air bags are a supplement, not a substitute, for seat belts, says NHTSA, pointing out unrestrained occupants can end up getting ejected, which the agency called “almost always deadly.”

Dr. Gerald O’Neill, medical director at the Penn Presbyterian Medical Center trauma center in Philadelphia, said that in his 15-year tenure he has noticed a slight increase in seat belt use among car crash victims, who sometimes arrive at the facility after being thrown from a vehicle, smashed against the windshield or flung around the inside.

“A lot of those things are directly related to whether they were wearing a seat belt or not, and they put them in a totally different risk category,” he said. “You definitely see greater severity of injury and a higher risk of death, and also more frequent injury from the no-seat-belt group.”

# Police ID woman set on fire on NYC subway

Christopher Cann and Ken Serrano  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Authorities have identified the woman who burned to death after she was set on fire inside a New York City subway train as 57-year-old Debrina Kawam.

At a news conference, New York City Mayor Eric Adams said Kawam, of Toms River, New Jersey, had a “brief stint in our homeless shelter system.” Neither he nor the police department said whether she was homeless.

Her identification on Tuesday came more than a week after the attack Dec. 22 shocked the nation’s largest city and raised concerns over safety in the public transit system.

Last week, a grand jury indicted Sebastian Zapeta-Calil, a 33-year-old

Guatemalan man in the country illegally, on murder and arson charges.

Prosecutors and police officials say the suspect approached a woman sitting on an F train subway car early that morning, set her on fire with a lighter and fanned the flames using a shirt. New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said the suspect sat on a platform bench near the train car as the woman burned before fleeing, and responding officers’ body cameras captured his image.

Tisch described the attack as “one of the most depraved crimes one person could possibly commit against another human being.”

Officials said Zapeta-Calil had been deported in June 2018 but made it back into the country. It was not known when and where he reached the U.S. illegally

again.

Zapeta-Calil was arrested Dec. 23 after he was spotted by several high school students on the subway in Midtown Manhattan.

At a court appearance last week, Assistant District Attorney Ari Rottenberg said Zapeta-Calil had identified himself in photos related to the grisly attack. Rottenberg also said the suspect told authorities he did not know anything about the incident. An attorney for Zapeta-Calil has not responded to USA TODAY’s requests for comment. His next court appearance was set for Jan 7.

Christopher Cann is a USA TODAY reporter. Ken Serrano is an Asbury Park Press reporter

Contributing: John Bacon and Thao Nguyen, USA TODAY; Reuters

# New laws

Continued from Page 1A

Board is required to include two people who have participated in the program. A different law aims to streamline the process for juveniles to clear their criminal records.

- In **Missouri**, a renewal of a 2012 law on criminal expungement expands it to allow a person to increase the number of expungements sought.

## Social media ban for minors

Under a controversial law, no one in **Florida** younger than 14 is allowed to have a social media account. The legislation replaced one that Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed because he wanted parents to have more of a role.

Social media platforms are required to terminate any accounts suspected of belonging to someone under 14. Account owners will have 90 days to dispute it. Anyone 14 or 15 years old whose accounts are targeted will have 90 days for a parent or guardian to provide consent.

There are hefty fines and civil liabilities for any social media sites that knowingly violate the law.

However, the part of the law addressing social media has already been challenged on First Amendment grounds. Attorney General Ashley Moody’s office has announced that the state would not be enforcing it on major social media platforms until the court rules on a motion for preliminary injunction. A hearing was set for late February.

The law also requires any website with “materials harmful to minors,” such as sexual content, that is visible in Florida to add age verification to prevent access by anyone under 18 years old.

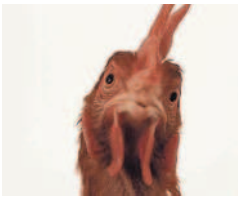
Again, hefty fines will be levied against sites that do not comply. That part did go into effect in the new year.

A similar law in Tennessee also took effect Wednesday.

## Gyms, pets and eggs

**Illinois** enacted a law to make it easier for residents to cancel their gym memberships. House Bill 4911 passed in the summer and allows people to cancel memberships either via email or a gym’s website.

**Pennsylvania** will join more than 35 states in helping protect pets in domestic violence situations by giving judges the ability to bar a defendant from possessing, abusing or harming the victim’s pet, according to local lawmakers. The law is set to take effect on Jan. 17.




**Colorado’s new law about eggs and cage-free facilities was approved in 2020.** MIKE BLAKE/REUTERS

All eggs sold in **Colorado** now must come from a cage-free facility. When lawmakers passed the measure in 2020, it was under threat from an animal advocacy group that promised to introduce a ballot measure if lawmakers didn’t do so. The law also requires Colorado egg producers with more than 3,000 hens to provide a cage-free environment.

Language in the **Nevada** Constitution changes after voters approved two ballot questions. The state is updating wording that refers to people with disabilities: “Insane” will be changed to “persons with significant mental illness”; “blind” to “persons who are blind or visually impaired”; and “deaf and dumb” to “persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.” The legislation also removes language authorizing slavery and involuntary servitude as possible criminal punishments.

Contributing: Matthew Rink, Erie Times-News; Melissa Brown, The Tennessean

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Here’s some of what you can expect.

### Jimmy Carter’s funeral

On Sunday, former president and Nobel Prize winner Jimmy Carter died at age 100 in Plains, Georgia, in the home he shared with his wife of 77 years, Rosalynn, who died in November 2023.

Funeral services for the former president will be held in Georgia and Washington, D.C., from this Saturday through Jan. 9.

In Americus, Georgia, a motorcade will pick up Carter’s casket and progress to Plains, then Atlanta, where Carter will lie in state for mourners to pay respects. He will eventually make his way to the U.S. Capitol and the Washington National Cathedral, where a national funeral service will be held.

Flags also will remain at half-staff for 30 days after his death, a timeline that overlaps Trump’s inauguration.



DADO RUVIC/REUTERS

### TikTok ban?

This spring, President Joe Biden passed legislation that would ban the hugely popular social media app TikTok in January if its Chinese parent company, ByteDance, does not sell it. The legislation has been in the works for several years because of fears that TikTok compromises national security.

If ByteDance does not sell TikTok by Jan. 19, the app will be illegal for distribution through the Apple App Store and Google Play Store. Internet service providers also will be required to make the app inaccessible on U.S. internet browsers.

In a last-minute decision, however, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments from TikTok and its parent company about why a ban could be unconstitutional. The Supreme Court is set to review TikTok’s arguments on Jan. 10, just over a week before the ban could be put in place.

Though China has been vocal about its opposition to selling TikTok, billionaire Frank McCourt has expressed his interest in purchasing the U.S. portion of the platform with a group of associates. McCourt, founder of Project Liberty and executive chairman of McCourt Global, said a consortium of associates has verbally pledged up to \$20 billion for the purchase.

But if McCourt purchased TikTok, it would be only the U.S. portion and would not include TikTok’s algorithm, which China sees as its intellectual property, McCourt told CBS’ “Face the Nation.”



CHENEY ORR/REUTERS

### Inauguration of Donald Trump

In January, Trump will begin his second, nonconsecutive term as the 47th president of the United States.

Trump will officially take over executive control of the country amid highly choreographed ceremonies on Jan. 20, which coincides with Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

It starts in the morning when Biden is expected to welcome Trump to the White House, as is custom. Around noon, the chief justice of the United States will administer the oath of office in a public ceremony at the U.S. Capitol. Trump will then deliver his inaugural address.

After the swearing-in, a traditional parade moves along Pennsylvania Avenue, featuring military bands, civic organizations and representatives from across the nation.

The day ends with inaugural balls and receptions.

### Criminal trials: Diddy, Luigi Mangione

American rapper and superstar Sean “Diddy” Combs will face the start of his federal sex crimes trial on May 5. He was indicted on sex trafficking and racketeering charges and faces claims from more than 100 accusers.

Combs was arrested at a Manhattan

# After a busy 2024, what’s on tap for ’25?

Mary Walrath-Holdridge USA TODAY

As the new year dawns, many Americans are still processing 2024, which saw historical events like a contentious presidential election, a once-in-a-lifetime solar eclipse and huge pop culture moments like the release of the movie “Wicked.”

There may be no major presidential election, no more Eras tour and no extremely rare celestial event to look forward to in 2025, but there is plenty more to come in the new year.

The calendar begins with a national day of mourning for former President Jimmy Carter on Jan. 9, followed by the inauguration of Donald Trump, which falls on Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Jan. 20.

In pop culture, Hollywood will celebrate a number of major awards shows culminating with the Oscars on March 2. Major movie releases will include a star-studded “Superman,” several offerings from the Marvel Cinematic Universe and a third installment of the “Avatar” franchise at the end of the year.

The year also will see major criminal trials, including those of Diddy and Luigi Mangione, and a potential ban on one of the most popular social media apps in the country.

hotel Sept. 16 and arraigned the next day. He has maintained his innocence and pleaded not guilty on all federal criminal charges, despite mounting civil lawsuits over the past year. He has been incarcerated in the Special Housing Unit at Brooklyn’s Metropolitan Detention Center since his arrest.

Prosecutor Emily Johnson told the court the prosecution’s case would last at least three weeks. The defense case is expected to take a week, defense lawyer Marc Agnifilo said.

Luigi Mangione, the 26-year-old accused of shooting UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson to death on Dec 4, also faces a criminal trial in 2025. Mangione has been charged in federal court, Pennsylvania state court and New York state court.

In the New York case, Mangione faces 11 charges, including first-degree murder in furtherance of terrorism, two counts of second-degree murder, including one as an act of terrorism, and a slew of weapons charges. In Pennsylvania, he was charged with forgery and illegally possessing an unlicensed gun, among others, while his federal charges include murder and interstate stalking.

The federal charges could bring a death sentence if Mangione is convicted.

He has pleaded not guilty.



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### ‘Wicked’ Part 2

The second part of the two-act release, called “Wicked: For Good,” is set for release Nov. 21 – one year (minus a day) after the first installment.

“Wicked” and “Wicked: Part 2” were shot back-to-back from December 2022 to January 2024, according to Forbes, which means the second installment of “Wicked” already has been filmed.

### The third Avatar installment

The third installment of the “Avatar” series, “Avatar: Fire and Ash,” hits theaters Dec. 19, three years after “Way of Water” and about 15 years after the original 2009 film.

As in “Way of Water,” “Fire and Ash” will introduce viewers to a whole new tribe of Na’vi called “The Ash People,” according to multiple outlets, including Parade and Variety. As the name suggests, this tribe has a culture that revolves around fire, a direct contrast to the water tribe of the previous film.



UNIQUE NICOLE/GETTY IMAGES

“You’ll see a lot more Pandora that you never saw before,” director James Cameron told Variety.

Stars include Zoe Saldana, Sam Worthington, Sigourney Weaver, Kate Winslet and Michelle Yeoh.

### More movie and TV releases

There is no shortage of media releases in 2025, from revamps of classic shows to long-awaited new seasons and big-screen premieres.

- Dates TBD: “Stranger Things,” “You,” “Squid Game” Season 3 (Season 2 arrived in December), “Wednesday,” “Monster,” “The Last of Us,” “A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms,” “Welcome to Derry,” “The Handmaid’s Tale,” “What Not to Wear” reunion, “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia,” “The Bear” and “Welcome to Wrexham.”

- Thursday: A modern revamp of “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” airs on ABC.

- Jan. 27: “The Bachelor” returns to ABC.

- Feb. 14: Season three of “Yellowjackets” comes to Paramount+ with Showtime.

- Feb 16: “White Lotus” returns to HBO.

- Feb 26: Season 48 of “Survivor” begins on CBS.

- April 22: “Andor” Season 2 comes to Disney+.

### Space exploration

Space agencies such as NASA and SpaceX have some major missions planned for this year.

Elon Musk is pushing for SpaceX to significantly ramp up Starship test launches in 2025, a proposal that would quintuple the flight tests of the SpaceX megarocket from five demonstrations in 2024 to 25 next year. Musk’s request would need approval from federal regulators.

SpaceX envisions the powerful spacecraft being a fully reusable transportation system that can carry humans and cargo to Earth’s orbit, the moon and even Mars. Though SpaceX is rapidly preparing for its flight test, the company has not yet announced a target date.

Also, a commercial lunar lander will soon be heading to the moon with a fleet of scientific instruments for a \$93.3 million NASA mission to study the moon’s environment before humans return.

The lander’s instruments will examine the lunar subsurface and glob-

al navigation satellite abilities, among other questions. The data NASA hopes to collect also should provide insights into how space weather and other cosmic forces affect Earth.

NASA’s cutting-edge SPHEREx telescope is also on the cusp of launching on a mission to solve some of the universe’s oldest mysteries – including how it came to be. The telescope, which has a \$242 million price tag, was developed to survey more than 450 million galaxies and 100 million stars in our own Milky Way. Some galaxies it will observe are so distant that their light has taken 10 billion years to reach Earth.

The two-year mission will launch no earlier than late February.

Likewise, the first step in establishing the world’s first commercial space station will come as early as August. Vast, a space company based in Long Beach, California, announced in 2023 that it plans to launch its space station, called Haven-1.

The mission will be quickly followed by Vast-1, the first human space-flight mission to Haven-1. The four-person crew will ride a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft to dock with the station for up to 30 days while orbiting Earth, according to Vast.



NASA TV VIA REUTERS

### Boeing Starliner astronauts to return on SpaceX vehicle

NASA’s Starliner astronauts will make their long-awaited homecoming to Earth as early as the end of March.

Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore weren’t supposed to be at the International Space Station beyond a few days in June when they reached the orbital outpost on the inaugural flight test for Boeing’s Starliner spacecraft. But their return was delayed multiple times until NASA finally decided in August that the safest route would be to send the pair back to Earth on a SpaceX Dragon vehicle.

The Boeing Starliner undocked in September without the astronauts and landed in the New Mexico desert.

The Starliner astronauts were set to return in February with two spacefarers who are part of a SpaceX mission called Crew-9. But earlier in December, NASA opted to delay that return until late March to give time to ready the Dragon vehicle that will ferry their replacements to the space station.

### No historic eclipse, but more space events to come

The year will begin with a “planet parade” during which Venus, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars all shine brightly every night after sunset in January and February. In January and February, look for Venus and Saturn in the southwestern sky and Jupiter and Mars toward the southeast.

On Jan. 13, a lunar occultation of Mars will be visible in the U.S. A lunar occultation occurs when the moon passes in front of a star or planet and blocks its light for about an hour before moving on its way around the Earth.

March 13-14 will see the only total lunar eclipse visible from the United States in 2025. A total lunar eclipse occurs when Earth comes directly between the sun and full moon and casts a shadow onto the lunar surface.

On April 22-23 and Oct. 21-22, the annual Lyrid and Orionid meteor showers will appear in the night sky.

The year’s lunar events will wrap on Nov. 5 with a supermoon.

### Award shows

One consistent we know we can look forward to every year without fail: awards season. This year’s shows will play out on the following schedule:

- This Sunday: 82nd Annual Golden Globe Awards
- Sunday, Feb. 2: 67th Grammy Awards
- Saturday, Feb. 8: Director and Producer Guild of America Awards
- Sunday, Feb. 16: BAFTA Film Awards
- Sunday, Feb. 23: 31st Screen Actors Guild Awards
- Sunday, March 2: 97th Academy Awards
- September (TBD): 77th Emmy Awards

*Contributing: J. Staas Haught, USA TODAY Network; Dean Regas, Cincinnati Enquirer; Naledi Ushe, Edward Segarra, Jeanine Santucci, Aysha Bagchi, Greta Cross, Saman Shafiq and Eric Lagatta, USA TODAY*



# Cybertruck explodes at Trump hotel in Vegas

1 dead, 7 hurt in blast outside hotel entrance

Eve Chen and Bailey Schulz  
USA TODAY

LAS VEGAS – One person is dead and seven were hurt after a Tesla Cybertruck caught fire and exploded early Wednesday near the covered entrance of Trump International Hotel Las Vegas.

“We were told that a 2024 Cybertruck pulled up to the front of the hotel, and in fact I can tell you it pulled right up to the glass entrance doors of the hotel,” Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sheriff Kevin McMahonill at a news conference. “We saw that smoke start showing from the vehicle and then a large explosion from the truck occurs.”

He said a person inside the EV died and seven people sustained minor injuries, but there did not appear to be any further threat to the community.

“We have now confirmed that the explosion was caused by very large fireworks and/or a bomb carried in the bed of the rented Cybertruck and is unrelated to the vehicle itself,” Tesla CEO Elon Musk posted on X Wednesday afternoon.

## Hours after New Orleans attack

First unveiled in 2019, the Cybertruck is a battery-powered EV and Tesla’s first truck. The vehicle gained attention for its post-apocalyptic styling. It was marketed as having a “bullet tough” stainless-steel frame and “basically rock-proof” armored glass, according to statements from Musk.

The explosion happened just hours after 10 people were killed and more than 30 were hurt in an attack involving a truck in New Orleans in the early hours



The Tesla Cybertruck caught fire and exploded Wednesday morning near the entrance of Trump International Hotel Las Vegas. BAILEY SCHULZ/USA TODAY

of New Year’s Day, prompting increased scrutiny from law enforcement in Las Vegas.

“We’re very well aware of what has happened in New Orleans with the event that occurred there, and the number of victims there and the additional IEDs. So as you can imagine, with an explosion here on iconic Las Vegas Boulevard, we are taking all of the precautions that we need to take to keep our community safe,” McMahonill said.

The Las Vegas explosion was being investigated as a possible act of terror, CNN and ABC News reported citing officials with knowledge of the investigation.

“I know you’re looking for a lot of answers,” Jeremy Schwartz, acting special

agent in charge for the FBI in Las Vegas, said at the news conference. “We just don’t have a lot of answers. We’re going to continue to work as hard as we can over the next 24 to 48 hours to hopefully get more to you.”

**‘We were worried’**

Colette Robertson, of Orlando, Florida, said she was in a hotel room on the 38th floor of the Trump International Hotel early Wednesday when she heard explosions from below.

“All we could see was plumbing smoke coming out,” Robertson said, standing on the Las Vegas Strip near where police had set up a blockade. “We were worried.”

Robertson said she headed downstairs to investigate and could see a Cybertruck parked near the hotel’s front doors. Robertson said she and other guests were evacuated from the hotel about an hour later.

“We were supposed to fly out at 2:30,” Robertson told USA TODAY shortly before noon Pacific Time, pointing out that her luggage and rental car were still at the hotel. “I don’t know how that’s supposed to happen.”

Tricia Boyer, who was staying at the Trump hotel with her family, said she initially dismissed the explosion as fireworks left over from New Year’s Eve celebrations.

“We thought for sure that some random firework didn’t go off last night and just randomly went off,” Boyer, of Phoenix, told USA TODAY. But “it was quite the boom.”

When Boyer later left her hotel room on the 30th floor to let her French bulldog outside, she said the elevator smelled like smoke, the air was “a little hazy,” and she was ushered outside once she reached the lower level. She said her husband and five children remained in the hotel, along with her wallet and other belongings.

“I’m still in my pajamas,” she said. “Everything’s in the room. I don’t even have socks on. I have nothing on me – I just have my phone, and one of the nice security guards over at the Wynn gave me some water. So we’re working it out.”

The public was being asked to stay away from the area. Investigators said most guests had been moved to nearby Resorts World Las Vegas.

“The safety & well-being of our guests and staff remain our top priority. We extend our gratitude to the Las Vegas Fire Department and local law enforcement for their swift response,” Trump Las Vegas posted on X.

# ‘We’ll miss him dearly’: Carter’s hometown mourns

Alex Gladden  
Montgomery Advertiser  
USA TODAY NETWORK – Alabama

PLAINS, Ga. – From Dollar General to the local high school, Americans had words of admiration in Jimmy Carter’s hometown for a local hero who became president and leader of the free world and died Sunday at age 100.

Two National Park Service rangers hung wreaths marked with black ribbon on the doors Monday morning outside Carter’s high school. The school is now the Plains High School Visitor’s Center and is dedicated to teaching people about Carter.

Inside, Sandra Hicks – who lives down the road in Americus, Georgia – was touring the school with her grandsons. She wanted to teach the boys about Carter’s legacy, “so they can learn more about where he actually came from – get a firsthand experience of what it looked like.”

Hicks met the Carters while she was working at the photo center in the Walmart in Americus.

“He was never a stranger, even with Secret Service and what have you,” Hicks said.

One of her grandsons, Jaxson Hughes, 11, expressed his appreciation for having a president from around where he lives. He said Carter knew the struggle of the people in the area and was able to advocate for them.

Hicks mentioned Carter’s long history of humanitarian work, particularly his time with Habitat for Humanity, which she said he did much good in Americus.

On a broader scale, Hicks said, Carter also helped change the culture of Americus into one that cared for all the people of the town.

Learning about the president “has been definitely insightful,” Hughes said.

Dave and Nancy Shelbourne also visited the school Monday. They are from Indianapolis and were driving to Naples, Florida, for the winter.

After Carter died, they stopped in Plains to learn about the president who shares a name with their grandson, also named Carter. Although their grandson is not named after the president, Carter is his favorite president.

They also said they wanted to pay their respects to the former president.

“It’s just nice to know there are still good people in the world still trying to



National Park Service ranger Mary Anne Robbins, hangs wreaths on the front entrance of the Jimmy Carter Visitor center on Monday. PHOTOS BY MICKEY WELSH/USA TODAY NETWORK



Lakandice Johnson, of New Orleans, from left, and Robin K. Melton, Kylan Dawson, and Mechelle Melton, all of Columbus, Ga., visit Jimmy Carter's childhood bedroom at the Carter's family farmhouse in Plains, Ga.

do things for humanity,” Dave Shelbourne said.

In the hours after Carter’s death, the only business open at 8:30 p.m. Sunday in Plains was Dollar General.

People bustled through the store, including Penny Smith, who has lived in Plains for 48 years. She married into the town, she said with a smile, adding later that she knew Carter.

“It’s been an experience. I actually worked for the city for many years and was very involved in President Carter’s dealings,” Smith said.

She said she served on the Better Hometown Program with Carter and helped form the Friends of Jimmy Carter National Historic Site.

“He loved his community, and he did a lot for his community,” Smith said. “We’ll miss him dearly.”

Brad Bagwell, who drove up a few minutes after Smith, described Carter as inspiring. Bagwell lived in Plains as a child and was back to visit family.

“I’d say he’s kind of the fabric of the community and something that everybody rallies around,” Bagwell said. “He’s always been around to care about, not just the town but the people.”

At Jimmy Carter’s Boyhood Farm on Monday, sisters Dawn Tarpley and Holly Cooper were walking Mishka, a pomeranian-Husky mix who is Cooper’s service dog.

The pair were in from Texas. They had planned the trip before the president’s death.

“Carter was an exceptional person and exceptional man,” Cooper said.

The women were teenagers in the 1970s and remember Carter’s presiden-

cy firsthand.

“We’ve admired him for years,” Cooper said. “He was a man who stood up for his beliefs.”

Tarpley echoed her sister’s sentiments.

“He just lived his life in an honorable way,” Tarpley said.

Throughout the early afternoon, families streamed steadily onto the farm. Robin Melton and her family arrived from Columbus, Georgia. She said Carter makes her think of her father.

“Well it’s hard when I think about Carter. I think about my dad,” she said, noting they lived in the same era. “They believe definitely in prayer.”

She said she visited Plains the day after his death “to visit the places he lived and just to be a part of this.”

Her son, Kylan Dawson, said he remembers coming to the farm on holidays. The family used to bring Melton’s father.

Robin Collins traveled from Lumpkin, about 25 miles from Plains, to visit the site with her three grandsons.

Collins noticed when she moved to the area about three years ago that Carter had been a boost to the community, bringing business to the small town.



# Roberts warns of threat to courts

‘Illegitimate activity’ on rise, chief justice says

**Maureen Groppe**  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON - Chief Justice John Roberts warned that the independence of the federal courts is under threat from “illegitimate activity,” raising concerns about violence and intimidation against judges, disinformation and possible defiance of court opinions.



Roberts’ year-end report came after another tumultuous year for the Supreme Court in which the justices issued controversial decisions about President-elect Donald Trump and other high-profile issues. The justices also continued to battle low approval ratings and calls for ethics reform. More Americans have disapproved than approved of the way the Supreme Court is handling its job in surveys by Gallup since September 2021.

Former Chief Justice William Rehnquist’s comment in 2004 that criticism of judges had increased in recent years is “just as true, if not more so, today,” Roberts wrote Tuesday.

“Unfortunately, not all actors engage in ‘informed criticism’ or anything remotely resembling it,” he said.

Roberts decried the volume of hostile threats and communications directed at judges, which has more than tripled over the past decade, according to the U.S. Marshals Service. More than 1,000 serious threats against federal judges have been investigated in the past five years, and about 50 people have been criminally charged.

The chief justice called out critics who publicize judges’ addresses and phone numbers.

In June 2022, a California man who allegedly made threats against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh was arrested near the justice’s suburban Washington, D.C., home while armed with a gun and knife.

Roberts also criticized public officials he said have tried to intimidate judges by suggesting political bias is behind their decisions.

“Public officials certainly have a right to criticize the work of the judiciary, but they should be mindful that intemperance in their statements when it comes to judges may prompt dangerous reactions by others.”

What public officials don’t have the right to do, he said, is defy court opinions.

“Within the past few years, however, elected officials from across the political spectrum have raised the specter of open disregard for federal court rulings,” Roberts said.

Some court watchers have drawn attention to a comment Vice President-elect JD Vance made in a 2022 podcast interview, suggesting Trump shouldn’t let himself be constrained by the courts if he won again.

Democrats who have pushed for changes to the Supreme Court – including term limits for justices – have been accused by critics of being motivated by partisanship because of the court’s conservative supermajority. In July, President Joe Biden called for major changes, saying, “Extremism is undermining the public’s confidence in the court’s decisions.”

In May, Roberts rebuffed Senate Democrats’ request to meet to discuss ethics questions swirling media reports that flags associated with the “Stop the Steal” movement flew from Justice Samuel Alito’s homes in Virginia and New Jersey.

Democrats complain the ethics code the court adopted in 2023 after reports of lavish trips Justice Clarence Thomas accepted from billionaire Republican donor Harlan Crow does not include an enforcement mechanism.

“The highest court in the land can’t have the lowest ethical standards,” Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said in releasing his final report on the court in December. “So long as Chief Justice Roberts and the Judicial Conference refuse to act, we must push for a legislative solution to this crisis to restore trust in the highest court.”

Roberts did not address any of Democrats’ proposed changes.



Grand Prismatic Spring at Yellowstone National Park features thermal activity in 2021. ANDREW WEST/USA TODAY NETWORK

# Scientists are tracking changes at supervolcano in Yellowstone park

**Elizabeth Weise**  
USA TODAY

Scientists are tracking changes at the giant supervolcano that lies under Yellowstone National Park, but they say there’s no need to worry at the moment.

“The western part of the Yellowstone caldera is waning,” said Ninfa Bennington, a volcano geophysicist with the U.S. Geological Survey and lead author on a paper in Wednesday’s edition of the journal Nature.

The caldera is the enormous volcanic crater left from the last time Yellowstone experienced a giant eruption, 640,000 years ago. It covers an area about 30 by 45 miles.

The findings mean that the future of volcanic activity at Yellowstone is in the northeastern part of the park, and there’s no chance it’s going to blow anytime soon.

“This volcanic system is not capable of producing that sort of eruption,” Bennington said.

For now, Yellowstone’s mud pots will keep boiling, the hot springs will keep steaming, the geysers will keep spraying, the Earth will keep shaking and the fumaroles will keep venting. The massive underground pools of magma below the storied park are still red-hot, ranging between 1,247 degrees and 2,512 degrees, Bennington said.

## Learning more about the magma under Yellowstone

Yellowstone is one of the planet’s largest volcanic systems, a place where a plume of the Earth’s molten core rises through the solid rock of crust, heating and melting it to form reservoirs of magma 2½ to 30 miles below the surface.

In the past this often was pictured as a single underground lake of lava beneath volcanos, but newer mapping and imaging techniques make it possible to see the complex systems of reservoirs the magma had gathered in.

An imaging technique that produces more precise maps of the large reservoirs of magma under the park shows large pods of deep magma leading up to more shallow ones closer to the surface in the northeast, which tie into the park’s famed hydrothermal systems.

To know how likely a volcano is to erupt, volcanologists calculate something called a melt fraction. It’s the ratio of how much magma (which they call “melt”) to the total volume of crust.

“Think of the Earth like a sponge,” Bennington said. But instead of water filling the holes and crevices, it’s molten rock. In a volcanically active area, there’s a greater proportion of magma to earth. The higher the proportion of magma, the more eruptible the area is.

The mapping was done using magnetotellurics that measure the electrical conductivity of what lies below the Earth’s surface. Melted rock, magma, is extremely good at conducting electricity, so it makes precise mapping of areas where magma is stored possible. The testing was conducted over several months by scientists from the USGS, Oregon State University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

What they showed was that while

there are multiple enormous reservoirs of magma under Yellowstone, they’re separated from one another.

“It would be difficult to mobilize into a single eruption because they’re not connected,” Bennington said.

## When will Yellowstone erupt?

It’s still possible that the northeastern portion of the park could erupt in a massive explosive eruption similar to those that have occurred at Yellowstone in the past 2.1 million years. In those events, volcanic ash reached from the Pacific ocean to Canada to Mexico.

They tend to reoccur about every 600,000 to 800,000 years, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

The most recent one was 640,000 years ago. It’s known as a super-eruption because it released an estimated 250 cubic miles of material – 1,000 times larger than the Mount St. Helens eruption in Washington state in 1980.

For now, the spaces in the sponge aren’t full enough of magma to support an eruption. For that to happen, the system would need more magma to fill more spaces in the crust’s “sponge.” Once the system got to some crucial fraction of those spaces filled with magma, it could cause an eruption.

“But we’re not nearly there now,” Bennington said. “We’re talking geological time scale.”

That’s hundreds of thousands of years – and possibly much longer.



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# Attack

Continued from Page 1A

told reporters that an Islamic state flag was hanging from the truck trailer’s hitch. She also said the bureau does not believe Jabbar was “solely responsible” for the attack.

The FBI said that weapons and a possible improvised explosive device were found in the suspect’s vehicle and that other “potential IEDs were also located in the French Quarter.”

The Associated Press reported late Wednesday that guns and pipe bombs also were found in the vehicle, citing a Louisiana State Police intelligence bulletin it obtained. The devices, “which were concealed within coolers, were wired for remote detonation, the bulletin said, and a corresponding remote control was discovered inside the vehicle,” according to the AP report.

The report also said surveillance footage reportedly shows three men and a woman placing one of multiple improvised explosive devices.

USA TODAY was not able to immediately confirm AP’s reporting on the intelligence bulletin.

## ‘Mission to kill’

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell said multiple times at Wednesday afternoon’s news conference that the site of the truck collision on Bourbon Street remains an “active crime scene” as investigators hunt for clues.

“I am grateful for the brave and swift response of local law enforcement in preventing even greater death and injury. I have directed my team to ensure every resource is available.”

President Joe Biden

Earlier Wednesday, Cantrell told reporters the driver was on a mission to kill as many people as possible. “He was hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did. ... This man was trying to run over as many people as he possibly could. It was not a DUI situation,” Cantrell said.

Hundreds of police officers were in the city for New Year’s Eve duty when the assault happened, Cantrell said. The driver of the truck swerved around barricades on his way into the crowd, she said.

“Last night, we had over 300 officers out here, and because of the intentional mindset of this perpetrator who went around our barricades in order to conduct this,” the mayor said.

Meanwhile, details are starting to emerge about the victims. Tiger Bech, a 28-year-old native of Lafayette, Louisiana, died as a result of his injuries in the attack, NOLA.com reported, citing the athletic director at St. Thomas More Catholic High School, where Bech had played football.

A University of Georgia student was critically injured and “receiving medical treatment,” according to university President Jere Morehead.

“I have spoken to the student’s family and shared my concern, support and well wishes on behalf of the entire UGA community,” Morehead posted on X.

## State of emergency declared

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry said he had expected to issue an emergency declaration Thursday to coordinate local, state and federal authorities for Super Bowl 59 on Feb. 9 and for Mardi Gras, which begins Monday.

The Louisiana governor said he moved up the declaration to Wednesday because of the attack.

Meanwhile, New Orleans police said they’ll be ready for upcoming events. The department is deploying resources at a level like other recent major events, such as the Taylor Swift concert. They will work alongside local, state and federal partners to provide extensive security coverage across the city.

“Residents and visitors can expect to see a strong presence of marked and unmarked police vehicles, as well as officers on foot, bike, and horseback as part of the department’s Mounted Patrol,” Kirkpatrick said. “This increased visibility will enhance public safety, provide crowd control, and allow for rapid response to any incidents.”

President Joe Biden, who was traveling to Camp David in Maryland on Wednesday, issued a statement noting he was being briefed by federal law enforcement leadership and the Department of Homeland Security.

Biden added that the attack was being investigated as an “act of terrorism.”

“I am grateful for the brave and swift response of local law enforcement in preventing even greater death and injury,” the president said in the statement. “I have directed my team to ensure every resource is available as federal, state, and local law enforcement work assiduously to get to the bottom of what happened as quickly as possible and to ensure that there is no remaining threat of any kind.”

The FBI, the Justice Department’s National Security Division, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and federal prosecutors in Louisiana were working with state and local law enforcement in response to the attack, Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement.

President-elect Donald Trump, on his Truth Social platform, called the attack “pure evil.”

“When I said that the criminals coming in are far worse than the criminals we have in our country, that statement was constantly refuted by Democrats and the Fake News Media, but it turned out to be true,” Trump said. “The crime rate in our country is at a level that nobody has ever seen before. Our hearts are with all of the innocent victims and their loved ones, including the brave officers of the New Orleans Police Department. The Trump Administration will fully support the City of New Orleans as they investigate and recover from this act of pure evil!”

Bourbon Street is a nightlife hub that draws thousands for New Year’s Eve celebrations in New Orleans. The truck attack came hours before the city was set to host the Sugar Bowl playoff game between Notre Dame and the University of Georgia at Caesars Superdome. Jeff Hundley, the Sugar Bowl committee CEO, announced that the game will now be played Thursday.

“It’s in the best interest of everybody and public safety that we postpone,” Hundley told reporters.

## Security heightened in capital

The Metropolitan Police Department in Washington heightened its security Wednesday across the city as a precaution, although there was no known threat to the city, said Paris Lewbel, deputy director of communications for the department.

High-profile events expected to attract crowds to the city include the convening of the new Congress on Friday, the counting of Electoral College votes on Monday, former President Jimmy Carter’s funeral proceedings Tuesday through Thursday, and President-elect Donald Trump’s inauguration Jan. 20.

“As we approach upcoming major events in the District of Columbia, MPD will continue working with our local and federal partners to assess potential threats and make any necessary adjustments to safeguard the community,” Lewbel said.

Contributing: Mark Giannotto



Police seal off the intersection of Canal Street and Bourbon Street in New Orleans’ popular French Quarter on Wednesday. MATTHEW HINTON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

# Vehicles are a cheap, deadly weapon in terror attacks

Trevor Hughes and Bart Jansen  
USA TODAY

Cheap and simple vehicle-based attacks have rapidly become one of the deadliest forms of terror assaults worldwide, killing and injuring thousands of people internationally since they began becoming more frequent after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Experts say a combination of factors have increased the number of vehicle attacks in recent years, notably the increased focus on outdoor events after the pandemic, ease of access to trucks or cars, and the uncomplicated nature of the approach itself.

Early Wednesday, an armed man deliberately drove a truck into a New Year’s crowd on New Orleans’ famed Bourbon Street, killing at least 10 and injuring more than 30 before being shot and killed by police. The attack raised fears about copycat incidents at multiple events around the country later in the day, including the annual Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena.

James Alan Fox, a professor of criminology, law and public policy at Northeastern University, said that while vehicle rammings remain relatively rare among mass-casualty incidents in the United States, “they can be quite deadly” in contrast to a gun attack.

“In the U.S., at least with the prevalence of high-powered firearms compared to other nations, I suspect that rammings will remain a small share of incidents,” Fox said. “Of course, if possible, barriers and street closings to protect crowds from vehicles would help, but in most situations that may not be practical.”

Just last month, a Saudi psychiatrist deliberately drove a rented BMW SUV through a German Christmas market, killing five and injuring more than 200. His motive remains under investigation, according to authorities.

New Orleans officials in 2017 began installing bollards along Bourbon Street to limit vehicle access and protect crowds, citing the risk from vehicle attacks. Contractors are removing and replacing those bollards with a new design, according to city officials.

In 2016, vehicle attacks internationally represented more than half of all terrorism-related deaths that year, according to one researcher’s analysis of the open-source Global Terrorism Database

“The accessibility of vehicles makes this a widespread threat (for) any gathering of people, whether for a New Year’s celebration or just a normal weekend on Bourbon Street,” said Ryan Houser, a terrorism and mass-casualty-attack researcher and consultant who wrote a 2022 study on such attacks.

Houser said vehicle attacks are on the rise internationally because they work.

“Vehicle ramming attacks have the ability to further democratize terrorism as a successful attack that merely requires a willingness to kill and can be completed by only one actor,” he concluded in his study. “The increased prevalence of outdoor activities and gatherings in a post-COVID-19 world will further expose large numbers of people to potential vulnerabilities within security that place them at risk of being the victim of vehicle-based terrorism.”

And though Europe has seen many similar attacks – including a truck attack in 2016 that killed 86 and injured 434 – the United States has also seen multiple incidents before Wednesday’s attack.

According to the Associated Press/USA TODAY/Northeastern University Mass Killing Database, before the New Orleans attack there had been three intentional and indiscriminate vehicle rammings since 2006, including the Nov. 21, 2021, attack on a Christmas parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin, that killed six and injured 62 others. Federal officials noted three other vehicle-based attacks in the United States in 2020 alone, although with fewer fatalities.

Houser, the terrorism and mass-casualty researcher, said vehicle attacks are a concerningly easy way to rapidly kill and injure a large number of people because the attack starts and finishes within seconds. That makes it hard for police to respond, he noted.

“A single vehicle has the potential to cause a large mass casualty incident that overwhelms local and mutual aid resources,” he wrote in his analysis. “Additionally, the traumatic injuries that result from a vehicle ramming incident have the potential to overwhelm the medical capabilities of emergency and operating rooms.”

Federal security experts have long warned about the risk from vehicle attacks and typically recommend a “layered” approach to preventing them during large gatherings like parades, concerts or street parties. Those measures usually include barriers across roads and sidewalks – cities often use trash trucks or snowplows – along with jersey barriers to create an s-shaped approach to limit vehicles’ speed.

Bourbon Street is a long, straight and narrow street lined with bars. At night when the bars are crowded, police usually bar vehicle access, allowing patrons to spill out onto the street. New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell said the driver in Wednesday’s attack swerved around barricades to reach the crowd.

“He was hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did,” Cantrell said at a news conference.

# Bridge pups

Continued from Page 1A

Plant Health Inspection Service and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But if the dog has no human owner, there is often no one to stop a pup that follows his or her nose over the international bridge, or through the shallow Rio Grande, or around the steel bollards of the border fence into U.S. territory.

“There is a poster at all the ports of entry,” Montana said. “If there is a stray dog or an immigrant family with a pet, the posters say ‘Please contact Ruby Montana.’”

Montana has saved dozens of migrant animals, finding forever homes –

first among her own extended family and then throughout the city and the Southwest. Rescue organizations in California and Arizona have pitched in.

El Paso border protection officers have taken in pups, and so have Army veterans. El Paso’s congresswoman rescued a border dog and called her Rio; with Montana’s help, they found her a home. Two former local photographers rescued border-crossing dogs; Lieu is living the good life in Austin, and Gringa has ridden out two hurricanes with his family in Florida.

Sometimes there isn’t a happy ending.

Montana has mourned the pups she has lost to illness or injuries. Her latest rescue, Floyd, is a senior and has a tumor that might be cancerous. A local vet is evaluating him. She posts “pupdates”

to her social media for every rescue.

“Sweet, sweet Floyd is back at his comfy foster home after his vet visit,” she wrote on Instagram on Dec. 21. Floyd’s comfort with getting into a car, and his habit of “howling” when he needs to relieve himself outdoors, gave Montana reason to believe he was dumped by his owners.

“Those days of being unwanted are long gone because we’re going to keep showing Floyd what love and care truly are!” she wrote.

Across the border, Ciudad Juárez is a tough town for a dog without a home. It’s a city of extremes, where the wealthiest residents travel with bodyguards and factory workers live hand-to-mouth, scrounging pesos.

In the city’s scruffy downtown – which connects to El Paso’s downtown

by an international bridge – strays compete for territory and food from restaurants or overflowing trash cans. The city doesn’t have a catch-and-spay policy, although the municipal government opened an animal wellness center in 2023 where people can report mistreatment. Still, local efforts to control the stray population are under-resourced.

Sometimes dogs are dumped. Sometimes they go looking for a better life.

“I don’t check dogs’ papers before I offer assistance or compassion,” Montana said.

So can dogs, too, chase the American dream?

Maybe the lucky ones. Or the most intrepid. The dog who makes it over the border and into Montana’s arms soon finds a cushy bed and doggy snacks waiting on the other side.



OPINION

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President-elect Donald Trump mimics a golf swing onstage while addressing the annual AmericaFest in Phoenix on Dec. 22. JOSH EDELSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



President Joe Biden disembarks from Air Force One in St. Croix, on the U.S. Virgin Islands, last Thursday. SAUL LOEB/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

What USA TODAY Opinion writers and editors hope and expect for 2025

Congratulations! You made it through 2024 and all – and we do mean *all* – that came with it. ● There’s no way around it: This was a historic year, and many of the events and their outcomes will reverberate well into the new year, if not beyond. ● So what does that mean for us? What will happen in 2025? ● We’re historically not great at making predictions, but that hasn’t stopped us before! Here’s what our USA TODAY Opinion columnists and editors look for from the year ahead.

Let’s give Trump a chance

I know. It’s a radical proposal. But in the spirit of the holidays, please consider this: Give President-elect Donald Trump a chance.

John Lennon, one of my favorite musicians, wrote in 1969, “Give Peace a Chance.” (And just to be clear, I wasn’t alive until 10 years later.)

I think we should do the same for the incoming president.

In the past year, we’ve experienced many once-in-a-lifetime events (or at least, very infrequent):

- Trump was the first former president convicted of a felony.
- President Joe Biden dropped out of the presidential race in July, after winning the Democratic primary – a decision he made historically late in the game.
- Trump survived two assassination attempts. In the first attempt in July, the bullet grazed his ear.
- And then, Trump became only the second president in U.S. history to win nonconsecutive terms. (Grover Cleveland was the first, more than 100 years ago.)

Regardless of where you may sit on the political spectrum, it’s been a remarkable year. And Trump’s decisive comeback is noteworthy, to say the least.

Voters did not like the direction the country was going in under Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, and they chose accordingly. Trump acknowledges he won based on frustrations with an unsecured border and the high costs of daily living.

No one president can turn things around overnight. But given everything Trump has overcome to once again become president of this great country, all I am saying is, let’s give him a chance.

– Ingrid Jacques

Remember 2024’s ‘Lie of the Year’? Will 2025 bring more of the same?

PolitiFact, the fact-checking organization run by The Poynter Institute, called it “The Lie of the Year,” which is really a high bar to clear after 2024’s presidential election.

The winners of this dubious distinction – President-elect Donald Trump and his running mate, Sen. JD Vance of Ohio.

Their lie – that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, were “eating the pets” of their neighbors. It was sheer nonsense from the first time Vance said it aloud to the time Trump made the claim from a presidential debate stage. Just utter folly, driven by a clear desire to demonize a group of people living in this country legally who didn’t look or sound like their neighbors.

That was the bad news. Here is the good news – Republicans from Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine down to the local level were willing to go public



Jacques

with the truth. Nobody was eating Springfield’s pets.

Even the Springfield woman who posted the claim on Facebook that went viral eventually acknowledged that she had no firsthand knowledge of any incident, and that she regretted the controversy.

Trump and Vance, of course, would never admit to peddling lies for political gain. But plenty of people – Republicans and Democrats – were willing to effectively push back.

That’s the kind of good news we’ll need more of in the coming year.

– Chris Brennan

It’s finally time for Republicans to take credit for what’s next

Let’s just be honest here.

We all know that 2025 will be the year of Republican rule. The GOP will have the House, the Senate, the Supreme Court and the White House.

Republicans will have total control, even if it’s slim, of governing this country. They will, if they manage to work together for once, have the final say and the authority to start making this country the conservative utopia they seem hellbent on creating.

You know what they won’t have anymore? They won’t have President Joe Biden to blame for whatever comes next.

No, this is now when Republicans get to take all the credit for their great leadership and 3D chess moves that will somehow reward billionaires and help our grocery bills plummet – or when they take all the blame for when things go the other way.

I expect to see our border with Mexico fully controlled and our gas prices to be back to \$2 a gallon. I’m excited for my taxes to get cut in half, but somehow, my quality of life will be improved. Our children will learn to become patriots, and somehow, wages will be improved by the very billionaires who likely had a hand in keeping pay down.

Though I’m sure it will be Biden’s fault if none of that happens.

So get ready, America. The year 2025 will be the rise of sensible governing brought to you by the party that is known for sensible governing.

– Louie Villalobos

Our kids will keep dying preventable deaths – because of guns

Here’s a prediction that, tragically, requires no precognition: Our children will keep dying from guns in astoundingly high numbers in 2025.

The current carnage’s statistics are stark, and the examples are horror shows we watch with numbing regularity. One of the latest happened Dec. 16 after a private Christian school student in Madison, Wisconsin, killed a fellow student, teacher and herself.



Villalobos



Bautista

When a 15-year-old girl pulls out a handgun in study hall and starts killing people around her, it’s the kind of thing that should rattle us so deeply that we are never the same. It should be something so heartbreaking that we *refuse* not to fix it.

But that isn’t what happens in the United States.

That’s thanks largely to the gun industry and political leaders who don’t challenge those firearm makers and advocates who dump millions of dollars into their campaigns.

One is my congressman, Chuck Edwards. Earlier this year, before leaving my job as a reporter, I asked Edwards, a Republican representing the North Carolina mountains, why the United States has so many firearm deaths, especially among children.

In 2020, guns became the leading killer of minors ages 1-17, surpassing motor vehicle accidents. Out of 100,000 U.S. children, six die annually from guns. (Compare that with 0.05 children shot to death per 100,000 in the United Kingdom and 0.6 per 100,000 in Canada, the closest statistically to the United States among wealthy democracies.)

Edwards joined the chorus from the right, blaming it on a U.S. “mental health crisis.” He refused to acknowledge the main problem: a gun proliferation crisis (firearm ownership is 120.5 per 100 people here, compared with 4.6 per 100 in the U.K. and 34.7 in Canada).

And until our leaders publicly admit that there are too many guns in the United States, the horror shows will continue.

– Joel Burgess

What do I want in 2025? A chance to rest.

As we stumble into a new year, many of us cling to hope that rest awaits us in the new year.

For me, this hope is simple yet fundamental for survival: collective rest.

Not the shiny, commercialized version of self-care sold to us in advertisements, but a genuine, restorative rest. A reprieve from the unrelenting grind of the fast-paced, microwave lifestyle that drains us emotionally, physically and mentally.

We are all on edge, exhausted by the demands of a rushed and distracted existence, with digital media interrupting our thoughts and productivity with every ping. From doom scrolling the latest crises to chasing fleeting dopamine hits from viral trends, the result is mental exhaustion – disguised as engagement.

The hustle culture glorifies working nonstop to achieve success, but are we ever satisfied?

I recently found myself measuring my worth by how productive I was. I was time blocking every waking moment of my life.

This rigorous pace leaves no room to breathe or reflect, only to survive.

We’ve become accustomed to living fast – eating fast, achieving fast and even resting fast. This rush for instant gratification leaves us feeling even more unfulfilled and overwhelmed.

We need rest, collective rest that creates societal shifts that prioritize well-being over productivity – such as work from home opportunities and mental health days.

As we make our New Year’s resolutions, let’s make rest a collective goal.

Let’s reject the notion that our value lies in how much we accomplish.

Instead, let’s find worth in how well we care for ourselves and each other.

– Marla Bautista



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MONEYLINE

SOME WILL GET 'EXTRA' PAYCHECKS THIS YEAR

People looking to save money for a big trip or investment may want to make plans around an “extra” paycheck in their pocket. Employees who get paid on a biweekly basis (every other week) can expect two months with a third paycheck in 2025. These months depend on when the first paycheck of the year is. In a 52-week year, employees who get paid biweekly usually receive two paychecks per month – 26 paychecks in total. Typically, employees paid biweekly receive two paychecks per month. If your first paycheck of 2025 falls on Jan. 3, you will receive three paychecks in January: Jan. 3, Jan. 17 and Jan. 31. You also will receive three paychecks in August: Aug. 1, Aug. 15 and Aug. 29. If your first paycheck of 2025 falls on Jan. 10, you will receive three paychecks in May: May 2, May 16 and May 30 – and October: Oct. 3, Oct. 17 and Oct. 31.



CASARSA GURU/E+ VIA GETTY IMAGES

PARENTS SHOULD BE ALERT ABOUT VIDEO GAME USAGE

A growing number of young Americans are ready to press play on video games. This holiday season, video game-related gifts topped wish lists for 76% of U.S. children ages 10-17, according to a recent survey from the Entertainment Software Association. More than 60% of Americans said they play video games at least one hour each week, according to the ESA survey. Parents should start by checking ESRB age ratings for video games their child is interested in, ESA senior vice president Aubrey Quinn told USA TODAY. ESRB ratings will include descriptions of the game and explain why a title has the age rating it received. The rating also will have information about possible interactive elements, such as in-game purchases or user-to-user communication. Quinn said that parents also should be sure to review parental controls on their child's gaming platform or mobile device. Companies selling the top consoles all have features that parents can use to help manage and monitor their child's gaming settings.



ANDREW KELLY/REUTERS

AGENCY SUES OVER ALLEGED FRAUD ON ZELLE PLATFORM

The U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau said on Friday it filed a lawsuit against JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America and Wells Fargo for failing to protect consumers from alleged “widespread fraud” on payments platform Zelle. The lawsuit was initiated as the watchdog moves ahead in the final weeks of the Biden administration to advance consumer protections before President-elect Donald Trump overhauls the agency, Reuters reported. The moves defy congressional Republicans, who have called for agencies to cease rulemaking. The CFPB seeks to stop the alleged unlawful practices via Zelle, secure redress and penalties, and obtain other relief for consumers, it said. “What they built became a goldmine for criminals,” making it easy for fraudsters to drain accounts, while providing insufficient protections for consumers or making them whole for losses, CFPB Director Rohit Chopra said.



The Lyleses moved to Morocco after falling in love with the country during their honeymoon. PROVIDED BY THE LYLESSES

These Americans share their experience being expats

Kathleen Wong USA TODAY

Moving 4,377 miles from Nashville to Tangier, Morocco, started as a playful joke between newlyweds Ricoyo and Arleevia Lyles, but it became their reality about two months ago.

• The couple first visited the North African country's coastal town for their honeymoon in September 2023. After falling in love with the food, architecture and warm culture, Ricoyo brought up the idea of living there.

“I wasn't expecting her to even give me any type of response or in- kling that she would want to do the same thing as well, but she was like, ‘That would be pretty cool,’ ” he said. With Ricoyo's job in finance and Arleevia's in public relations, the couple was already working remotely. They had no children, so moving would be a lighter load.

Living outside of the U.S. has always been a pipedream for Ricoyo, 40, who was born in the Bahamas but spent nearly all of his life in Nashville. “Growing up, I used to romanticize what it would be like to grow up in the Bahamas or experience another culture,” he said. “From a young age, it's always been a dream for me to do that.”

The low cost of living in Morocco and proximity to Europe and the rest of Africa were appealing, but more importantly, the couple was also looking for where they could start a family. Safety has been top of mind for Arleevia, 26, who is now pregnant with their first child. “Thinking about these things as we're preparing to have our first child has been in the back of our minds, especially as Black Americans where there's racial tension in the U.S.,” she said. “Thinking about that for our child and him (Ricoyo) as a Black man.”

Like the Lyleses, a growing number of Americans are enticed by the idea of moving abroad. Between 2011 and 2024, 21% of Americans said they wanted to leave the U.S., compared with 10% in 2011, according to migration data by Gallup. While a big motivator is the uncertain political

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Dennis Bailey has been living in Portugal since December 2021.

PROVIDED BY DENNIS BAILEY

“Go out in the middle of the country and see some of the smaller towns.”

Dennis Bailey  
Who lives in Portugal

Hidden rules on tax refund loans can come back to surprise you



Susan Tompor  
Columnist  
USA TODAY

Try to cover your holiday spending by taking out a loan against how much money you *might* get for your tax refund? Oh, it's being suggested all right.

The early tax refund advance season hits in December, months before many people would actually receive tax refunds after filing their 2024 federal income tax returns. But amazingly, it's just in time to fill Santa's sleigh.

Starting Dec. 16, for example, Jackson Hewitt noted online it was possible to get up to \$1,500.

The Jackson Hewitt ad online featured Santa's smiling mug and \$100 bills flying in the air. A red ribbon marked the spot on a yellow tag proclaiming: “Money Today Guarantee.”

“Your holidays just got happier,” the site read.

It's not a cheap way to borrow – far from it.

It would cost you roughly \$111 in finance charges – or an estimated annual percentage rate of 35.96% – to get \$1,500. You'd pay a little bit more than \$22 for a \$300 loan. These loans are available through Jan. 12. Your loan gets automatically repaid after you file your tax return with your tax refund.

A variety of tax refund-related financial products exist – including early tax refund loans, no-fee refund advance loans during the tax season, and refund anticipation checks that often are used by people who don't have money to pay their tax preparation fees on the spot.

But there's a growing concern that consumers don't always understand all the costs associated with such products – or know about many alternatives for getting their taxes prepared free.

A report issued in November by the

Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration indicated that 21.9 million – or 15.9% – of 2023 federal income tax returns used a refund-related product, such as a refund anticipation check or a refund anticipation loan.

Yet, consumers in some cases need to dig deep into the fine print or go through multiple pages of information to discover what they're paying for these services.

Those offering the services, the report declared, aren't always making it easy for taxpayers to find key information.

One big risk, as noted in the report: The taxpayer who takes out a refund anticipation loan could be on the hook to the lender for additional interest and other fees “if the financial institution does not receive a direct deposit of the taxpayer's refund within the expected time frame.”

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# Moving

Continued from Page 1B

climate – including the most recent presidential election, which was one of the biggest sources of stress for Americans – aspiring expats are also seeking out a better cost of living, safety, health care and culture that aligns more with their values.

But for most Americans, packing up or selling all their belongings and leaving behind what they’re familiar with is too intimidating or a logistical nightmare, like if they don’t work remotely. It ends up staying just a fantasy, and only some ever actually make the big move.

That sentiment echoed with Ricoyo before he took the leap. “My biggest thing is I overthought it,” he said. “It seemed like such a big feat. How would that even be? What would my life look like?”

Here’s what it’s like to move abroad, with tips from first-time expats.

## Do a trial run

You should obviously visit the place that piques your interest before you relocate your life, but the Lyleses recommend people stay there for a while to get a real taste of what life could be like. “Go out there for an extended month to test it out,” Ricoyo said. “See how you like it and adjust to the climate there.”

The fact that they could always return home if they didn’t like it there also gave the Lyleses solace. “Remember that nothing is permanent; you can always go to a different country or go back home,” Arleevia said. “Hey, if we don’t love it, we always have a home base.”

Until they get dual citizenship after five years of residency, as Americans, the couple is in Morocco visa-exempt, meaning they can stay for up to 90 days, then enter another country, like Spain – which is less than an hour away by ferry over the Strait of Gibraltar – and then

cross back into the country.

Many countries, including the European Union, Indonesia and Japan, allow travelers to visit for up to 90 days without a visa. If your profession allows for it, getting a digital nomad visa lets you stay and legally work longer – like one year in Spain and two in Portugal – and can take just a few weeks to be approved.

You can also take multiple visits to explore the country. When Dennis Bailey first visited Porto, Portugal, for a week in 2019, he fell in step with the easygoing, hospitable culture. “I’m a laid-back kind of person. This was a laid-back lifestyle; it was very relaxed and slow and different than what Washington, D.C., was like,” said Bailey, who recently published the book “Olá Portugal: Why I Moved to the Land of Sun and Sardines (and how you can too).”

“Man, you can get off the hamster wheel,” he thought to himself.

At the time, he was pondering his upcoming retirement. “I’m not wealthy. I don’t have a lot of savings and a small pension,” he said. “My apartment in Washington was \$3,000 a month, just for that month.” His apartment in the beach town of Carcavelos is about half that. Bailey was also turned off by the political landscape in the U.S. “All those things added up,” said Bailey, 71.

After his initial trip, he returned to Lisbon for “another reconnaissance” and suggested people do at least two trips. “Do it in different times of the year and do it in different places,” he said. “Go out in the middle of the country and see some of the smaller towns.” Though he enjoys the slow pace of Portugal, others who romanticize this type of life may realize they don’t actually like it on a daily basis.

## What are the logistics?

Not everyone has the luxury of picking up their life and relocating abroad, whether due to having to take care of a family member or work in an office.

When he moved, Bailey was single and his adult daughter was living on the West Coast, so nothing was tying him down to the U.S. He could also work from anywhere as a freelance journalist and didn’t have to find a job in Portugal to sponsor his visa.

In general, moving can be a nightmare, and internationally, it needs more legwork and, arguably, courage. The Lyleses made a pros and cons list to see if moving away from their family would be worth it, and the entire process took them about a year.

Bailey has been living on Portugal’s digital nomad visa since 2021, which permits him residency for two years with the option to renew. He did the visa paperwork himself and said it was relatively easy as long as you’re organized. He also had a Portugal-based woman, who he met on one of his trips and is now his wife, scout out apartments for him so he wouldn’t be paying rent in two places. After five years in the country, he becomes eligible for citizenship.

What he did find challenging was navigating the tax laws as an expat, so people may want to outsource assistance when it comes to the sometimes complicated legal obligations of living abroad.

“Be careful about what you see online,” he said. “I would get an accountant that understands expat taxes, and I would get a Realtor.” He also hired someone to help him get the Portuguese equivalent of a Social Security number.

With domestic moves, people tend to keep most of their belongings, but an international move calls for harder decision-making and light traveling. “It’s hard to give up a lot of your stuff,” Bailey said. The alternative is to ship your belongings internationally, which will probably cost thousands.

The Lyleses felt similarly. Getting approval from their places of employment and figuring out what to bring with them were the most difficult logistics, they said. The two decided to temporarily live with Arleevia’s family in Las Vegas

before their international flight, leaving their valuables there. In Morocco, they’re looking for a fully furnished apartment.

## Acclimating to a new culture?

The expat life seems to be going smoothly for the Lyleses and Bailey so far. In the three years since being in Portugal, Bailey said he sees his daughter more than when he was in the U.S., and her visits are longer, too. He enjoys the Portuguese culture of long dinners and the norm of “desfrutar,” or enjoying the moment.

“Since then I learned a lot about Portuguese culture, they got this work-life balance figured out,” he said. “They put an emphasis on leisure time and family time that’s really important to me.”

For both sets of expats, one of the hardest parts of living in another country has been the language barrier. Depending on where you are in Morocco, Arabic, French, Berber and Spanish are the most widely spoken languages, although English is common. To get citizenship, you need to be knowledgeable in Arabic or Amazigh.

Cultural differences also play a role, such as Morocco’s preference for cash, unlike in the U.S., where credit cards dominate. People should be aware of the local laws and customs before they move so they can behave respectfully. “Do your research. Lots of different countries have lots of laws with the way they operate,” Arleevia said. “Just being culturally aware and emphatic and not bringing your American mindset and standards with you because that’s not how everything works.”

With a due date in April, the couple plans to have the baby in the U.S. and return to Morocco in the summer to raise their new family for at least a few years.

“Sometimes it is nice to take a step back and a break from the drama,” Ricoyo said. “I encourage people to step out of their comfort zone.”

# Tompor

Continued from Page 1B

Taxpayers spent more than \$842 million in estimated fees to use a refund anticipation check to file their 2023 federal income tax returns, according to the treasury inspector general, which provides independent oversight of the Internal Revenue Service.

Refund anticipation checks – where the average fee was \$40 – allow taxpayers to avoid paying tax preparation fees upfront. Instead, part of their actual refund is used to cover those costs. Tax filers do not receive any of their refund money before the refund is issued when refund anticipation checks are used.

The bulk of those 21.9 million filers highlighted in the inspector general’s report – 96% – used refund anticipation checks.

The costs are likely even higher for taxpayers taking out advances. When it comes to refund anticipation loans, taxpayers could be looking at interest rates of around 35%, according to the report.

One provider – none were listed by name – promoted an advance loan product that was offered from Nov. 1, 2023, through Dec. 31, 2023, that had a rate of 35.9%, the report said. The loan had to be repaid by March 31, 2024, or additional fees and interest would apply. The loan limit was \$1,300.

While such terms might seem doable, especially when you want the cash early, risks remain, including potential lengthy delays in getting your refund to repay the loan. The delays can drive up your costs. Terms and conditions for refund anticipation loans vary.

On average, the report noted, it took the IRS 28 days to issue these refunds after it received the tax return for processing. Worse yet, 6% of tax returns filed this year with a fee-based refund anticipation loan were still awaiting a refund, according to the report.

Another key point: The IRS could spot errors and make adjustments to your tax return, which could end up reducing the amount of the refund.

Typically, the amount for a refund anticipation loan will be far less than your anticipated refund. Even so, if you end up with a much smaller refund than expected or end up owing money, you could run into trouble when it comes to paying off the loan.

## Why some spend extra

What’s troubling is that many taxpayers don’t have the money on hand to cover their tax preparation costs so they take on an extra cost to file as early as possible.

The fees connected to using a refund anticipation check ranged from \$22 to \$55 based on what was charged by the top seven providers during the filing

season this year, the report said. That fee is on top of other charges for actual tax preparation services.

Some filers, according to experts, use refund anticipation checks as a way to get around not having their own bank accounts and being unable to use direct deposit. Direct deposit is a quicker way to receive a tax refund than waiting for a check in the mail for six to eight weeks. Refunds for e-filed returns with direct deposit can take less than 21 days.

The so-called unbanked tap into a deal using a refund anticipation check offered by a tax preparer to get a new prepaid debit card to get their refund more quickly. The tax preparer works with a bank or lender that opens these accounts. Other fees could apply when you would use the prepaid card, too.

Nina E. Olson, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Taxpayer Rights, told me in a phone interview that low- to moderate-income families who qualify for the earned income tax credit face added challenges in covering the costs of getting their tax returns prepared or dealing with not having a regular bank account.

Olson said she has been recommending for decades that the IRS figure out a way to offer a government-sponsored prepaid debit card for those who are unbanked to cut down on the use of refund anticipation checks. One such program went through a pilot test in 2011 but was later dropped.

## Why Direct File could offer relief

She also has been pushing for a system in which taxpayers can file their taxes online directly through an IRS program to avoid high tax preparation costs. Olson served as the national taxpayer advocate, the voice of the taxpayer at the IRS, from March 2001 through July 2019.

Beginning this year, more people in more states will be able to file their own taxes for free through a new program called Direct File being run by the IRS. Olson hopes that Direct File could cut into some use of refund anticipation checks.

More than 30 million taxpayers in 24 states will be able to take advantage of Direct File to prepare and file their federal income taxes online directly with the IRS at no cost. The program is expected to expand nationwide.

The average U.S. taxpayer spends \$270 and 13 hours filing their taxes, according to the federal government. Direct File, launched as a very limited pilot program in 12 states in 2024, is designed to save do-it-yourselfers a buck and some time.

Other options exist, too. Many low-income to moderate-income people qualify for free tax preparation assistance at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites and Tax Counseling for the Elderly programs. Some volunteer sites

also offer prepaid debit cards for direct deposit of refunds for unbanked filers.

It’s also possible for many people to use the Free File Program through IRS.gov to use free software to prepare their returns. The Free File program resumes in January. The guided tax software will be free in 2025 to those with adjusted gross incomes of \$84,000 or less.

The IRS Free File Program is a partnership between the IRS and many tax preparation and filing software companies that provide their online tax preparation and filing for free.

Vital social safety-net benefits, such as the earned income tax credit and the child tax credit, are tied to filing a tax return. But people who need the money most really need to find lower-cost options for filing and preparing their taxes.

Spending \$300 on tax preparation services, plus extra fees, for some financially fragile families is like trying to deal with a \$3,000 emergency car repair for many well-off families, Olson noted.

And \$40 for a refund anticipation check is still \$40. It’s money that could be used for food or to cover other necessities, such as a tank of gas.

The treasury report said the average refund amount for taxpayers who used refund anticipation checks was \$3,841 – suggesting that many paid roughly 1% of their total refund to avoid upfront costs for tax preparation.

Another concern: Are you stuck paying for high-cost tax preparation fees if you take out a refund-related loan? Will you be locked into going back to the preparer to have your taxes done to cover those tax-refund-related loans?

## Holidays intersect with taxes

Year-end tax planning shouldn’t be about trying to spend next year’s tax refund before you get it by applying for a tax-related loan. But many loans offered in November and December could entice you to do just that.

“I hate those things,” Olson said. “People will go and do that because it’s around the holidays and you can get some money to do stuff.”

Consumers can spot a variety of loan products. The H&R Block Emerald Advance Loan is promoted online as a fixed-rate, short-term loan from \$350 to \$1,300 as a way to “catch up on bills” and pay for “holiday shopping.”

The money is available the same day you apply. Applications started Nov. 1 and ran through Dec. 31. You’d apply in-office at an H&R Block location. The annual percentage rate is 35.9% and you must repay your loan on or before March 31. If the loan is not paid in full within 14 days of its due date, you will owe a \$30 late fee and additional interest.

According to information posted online, you can repay with any debit card by phone or online, as well as by check or money order. Or, the site notes: “If you complete your taxes with H&R

Block and receive a refund, you can choose to repay your loan from your tax refund proceeds.”

For some who found money tight unexpectedly in 2024, short-term loans might have some appeal, especially if you can get cash immediately.

The online Jackson Hewitt ad notes: “Leave your local Jackson Hewitt with money in your pocket if approved for an Early Tax Refund Advance loan on a prepaid card.” You’d need to book an appointment or walk into a local office, including those set up in Walmart. You’d bring a recent paystub, a government-issued ID and a Social Security card for each individual filing and anyone you plan to claim on your return.

To apply for an Early Tax Refund Advance loan, someone would need to book an appointment with a Jackson Hewitt tax preparer by Jan. 12. The Jackson Hewitt loan notes that there is no credit check for its product. “Republic Bank does what is called a ‘soft credit pull,’ which does not impact a credit score,” a Jackson Hewitt spokesperson said. “People may get approved even if they have poor credit history.”

The Jackson Hewitt Early Tax Refund Advance loan amounts are determined by the expected federal refund, less authorized fees and underwriting, the Jackson Hewitt spokesperson said. If approved, a finance charge applies. Loan amounts available are \$100, \$300, \$500, \$1,000 and \$1,500.

To be eligible for the \$1,500 loan, the consumer’s expected federal refund, less authorized fees, must be at least \$4,600. Most approved applicants get loans for \$300, the spokesperson said.

“The amount owed is deducted directly from the client’s tax refund,” the spokesperson said. “If the tax refund is insufficient to pay the loan in full, tax refunds from returns filed in the following tax year with Jackson Hewitt may be applied to repay the outstanding loan balance, if applicable.”

In many cases, refund anticipation loans may be offered in January and promoted as having no fees. This year, for example, H&R Block will offer its “Refund Advance” loan, a refund anticipation loan which is automatically repaid from the borrower’s tax refund.

Tax filers receive up to \$3,500 and may apply while filing their taxes between Jan. 3 and Feb. 28. No interest and no fees are charged for that loan, which can be taken out when you pay to file your taxes at H&R Block.

If you’re considering any of these products, though, take time to review the restrictions and consider the possibility that you might not qualify for as big of a loan – or end up with as big of a tax refund – as you might expect. Also, consider possible options for doing your taxes for free and e-filing at no cost.

Taking a loan on an anticipated tax refund that you won’t get until February or later should be treated as a last resort.



# Best video games of 2024 ran the gamut

**Felecia Wellington Radel**  
USA TODAY

Whether it dragged for you or felt like someone pressed the skip button, 2024 has come to a close.

The year’s video games included brilliant indies and fantastic family-friendly entries, and brought iconic female characters front and center.

While some great titles from 2023 still had quite a bit of our attention coming into the year (looking at you, “Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom,” “Baldur’s Gate 3,” “Super Mario Bros. Wonder,” “Diablo IV,” “Marvel’s Spider-Man 2”), 2024 offered plenty of solid new entries – and new worlds to explore.

In no particular order, here are some of the best video games of 2024:

**‘Astro Bot’ (PS5)**

Astro Bot, a 3D platformer developed by Team Asobi and published by Sony Interactive, follows Astro as he navigates a galaxy, rescuing his fellow bots and trying to recover the stolen PCU after their spaceship is attacked and crashes on a desert planet.

As a tribute to the 30th anniversary of the Sony PlayStation, this title is a gift for all of us. The immersive game is adorable and witty, and any ease in puzzles is made up for by just how much fun it is to play, easy or challenging. It’s reminiscent of Super Mario or Kirby titles, but Astro Bot holds its own with creative gameplay, detailed visuals and Astro’s big personality. And don’t just take my word for it: Astro Bot won Game of the Year at the 2024 Game Awards, among other honors.

**‘Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom’ (Switch)**

Echoes of Wisdom, the latest in the mainline Legend of Zelda series, finally puts the titular princess in the lead. Link and other villagers have been “stolen away” by strange rifts opening up all over Hyrule. Zelda and her fairylike sidekick Tri set out to investigate what’s happening and save the kingdom.

The game’s new mechanics and charming story are clever and make it a joy to play and explore.



A scene from Astro Bot. PROVIDED BY SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

**‘Tekken 8’ (PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X/S, PC)**

Who knew family reunions could be so violent? In this latest installment in the long-running Tekken fighting game series, father Kazuya Mishima and son Jin Kazama are back for a (supposed) final confrontation, along with Jin’s mom, Jun Kazama, and other familiar faces. In addition to the usual characters and moves, Tekken 8 introduced new fighting mechanics, keeping things fresh.

**‘Neva’ (Switch, PS4, PS5, Xbox Series X/S, PC)**

Neva is an adventure game from developer Nomada Studio and publisher Devolver Digital, which follows a young woman, Alba, and her wolf cub companion, Neva. Following a tragedy, the two set out on a journey across a decaying world, solving puzzles and fighting corrupted creatures. The game has an adventure mode and a story mode, which focuses on the narrative and is slightly less challenging.

Neva is both full of heart and also heartbreaking. It’s smooth gameplay wrapped in a moving, beautifully styled story.

**‘Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown’ (Switch, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, PC)**

The newest addition to the Prince of Persia series is a side-scrolling action set in a beautiful landscape. In Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown, you play as a warrior, Sargon, on a rescue mission, solving puzzles, using acrobatics (parkour!) to navigate the world, and engaging in combat with a variety of enemies.

**‘Animal Well’ (Switch, PS5, Xbox Series X/S, PC)**

Animal Well, from developer Shared Memory and publisher Bigmode, is a Metroidvania-style game where you play as a blob exploring a mysterious underground world full of puzzles and other creatures, collecting items and abilities.

This adventure game is unique and atmospheric, the pixel-art visuals and audio are layered wonderfully as you explore the well and uncover its secrets.

**Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door (Switch)**

Mario is seeking treasure and looking for Peach in this papery title. Paper Ma-

rio: The Thousand-Year Door is a remake of the beloved GameCube classic and, while faithful to the original, it builds on that game and its gameplay, offering more to new players.

**‘Final Fantasy VII Rebirth’ (PS5)**

The action RPG Final Fantasy VII Rebirth picks up after the events of Final Fantasy VII Remake (2020). The game is engrossing and challenging in a rewarding way.

There is so much to explore and so many details in what is reportedly the second part of a planned trilogy it’s hard to leave.

Bring on the third one, please.

**‘Elden Ring: Shadow of the Erdtree’ (PS5, Xbox Series S/X, PC)**

Yes, the award-winning base game was released in 2022, but the Elden Ring: Shadow of the Erdtree DLC expands so much that it makes revisiting or rediscovering this game or picking it up for the first time an immersive treat.

**‘Honorable mention: Stardew Valley 1.6’ (Switch, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, PC)**

The game isn’t new, but the highly anticipated 1.6 update for Stardew Valley was released in March for PC and November for consoles and mobile, so it makes the list anyway.

The update brings so much new content to the popular game and breathes fresh life into this ultimate cozy life sim (though many of us never slowed or stopped playing). There’s a reason Stardew is the title against which so many cozy and farming sim games are compared.

**Honorable mention: ‘Princess Peach: Showtime!’ (Switch)**

The whole world is a stage for Princess Peach as she gets her moment to shine.

Princess Peach: Showtime! might feel a little rushed and simplistic in spots, but it’s fun overall. And it’s great to see Peach as the protagonist, owning the spotlight.

# Disney’s newest cruise ship brings its movies to life

## Experiences honor people, expand stories

**Eve Chen**  
USA TODAY

Disney Cruise Line’s newest ship, the Disney Treasure, sets sail on its maiden voyage on Dec. 21, and it’s already making Disney history.

Not only is it the first ship to take Disney parks-inspired experiences to the seas, but it’s also bringing beloved Disney film stories to life in new ways that honor the real people and stories behind them.

“We want to tell diverse stories. We want to tell engaging stories, but we also want to tell stories that you maybe didn’t think we were going to tell,” Walt Disney Imagineering’s Jason Roberts, senior producer on the Treasure, told USA TODAY during a preview sailing.

Here are the firsts awaiting Disney film fans aboard the Treasure.

**Plaza de Coco**

Plaza de Coco is Disney’s first “Coco”-inspired theatrical dining experience. It’s built into the dinner rotation aboard the Disney Treasure and spread across two nights.

“We had a unique opportunity to take the story and pick it up three years later, and the beauty of that is that Miguel is a teenager, and we got to see how music has truly and intrinsically changed the Rivera family,” said Juan Cantú, show director for Disney Live Entertainment.

Guests begin to see that in the artwork leading to the dining area, which is built to look like a cozy public square. Both Hector and Imelda top a family tree on the wall, and Hector is back in the family portrait on a stunning, sprawling ofrenda, just like at the end of the film. Night one of the Mexican-inspired dining experience builds upon that togetherness.

“On night two, we are celebrating Dia de Muertos, and that’s such an honor, as a Mexican American, to be part of telling that story in an authentic way because it isn’t just a story,” said Cantú. “This is part of a culture that is celebrated and honored in Mexico, and the beauty of culture is that it’s meant to be shared.”

While dining on a mix of authentic and approachable flavors like mole, birria, and blistered poblano, guests can feast their eyes and ears on folklórico dancing, live mariachi performances, and of course songs by Miguel and his great-great grandparents.

“As someone who pursued a career in musical theater, there weren’t always stories that were written with roles for me,” Cantú said. He called it the honor of his life to be part of the solution, elevating authentic stories and voices, and sharing them in a way that connects with guests no matter where they’re from.

**‘Disney The Tale of Moana’**

“It means a lot just because we don’t ever see our stories on the big screen. We don’t even see them on stage, rarely,” echoed Kaenaonalani Kekoa, who plays Moana in “Disney The Tale of Moana,” aboard the Treasure. It’s Disney’s first-ever stage production of the film. “Now, to be able to be that for some little brown girl or boy is a dream come true.”

Even though Moana is a fictional character and her island of Motonui isn’t real, the Polynesian people and places they represent are, so the show’s creators took great care in incorporating Polynesian voices from the very beginning.

Jenny Weinbloom, vice president of Live Entertainment for Disney Signature Experiences, said in addition to Broadway pros like director Connor Gallagher and puppet designer Michael Curry Design, they turned to cultural leaders from the Pacific Islands, like choreographer Peter Rockford Espiritu and music cultural consultant Aaron Sala.

“I would also be remiss not to acknowledge our unbelievable cast ... many of whom are from Hawaii and Pacific islands or the Hawaiian diaspora,” she said. “It’s been so moving and powerful to have them deeply embedded in the development of this story, from our very first readings all the way through our workshops to today.”

Kekoa, who is a native Hawaiian, said she feels the weight of the responsibility in caring for her ancestors’ stories and passing them down, but that’s how she knows it’s so special because she cares



**Kaenaonalani Kekoa, who is Native Hawaiian, proudly plays Moana in Disney’s first stage adaptation of the film, aboard the Disney Treasure.**  
EVE CHEN/USA TODAY

about it so much.

“The story of Moana and Moana herself, I mean, it’s about a girl doing the bravest thing that she could do, leaving her Island, leaving her family, everything that was safe to her, her community. But she left because of them,” she said. “It wasn’t because she thought that there was something bigger for herself because that’s not the Polynesian way. There’s always ohana, that’s who you do it for. You don’t do it for yourself. You go to and you come back, and you give back to those people. And that’s what I want to do.”

She hopes guests in the audience feel invited into the village, too. “That’s the Pacific style, yeah,” she said.

**Scat Cat Lounge**

Another first on the Disney Treasure is the elegant Scat Cat Lounge piano bar, the cruise line’s first venue inspired by “The Aristocats.”

“Such a great film,” said Alyssa Markfort, senior show manager with Walt Disney Imagineering. “There’s so much music in the film.”

Guests will see “Aristocats” cats in the lounge’s beautiful wallpaper, and if they’re lucky, hidden Roquefort, the friendly mouse from the film, instead of hidden Mickeys. Paw prints on the piano are double Easter eggs. They belong to Imagineers’ actual cats, including a memorial paw print from one of Mark-

fort’s cats, who died.

Also, she said, “All those paw prints and the pattern is inspired by the dance that they do during ‘Ev’rybody Wants to be a Cat.’ We watched the film and made sure we matched their little paw prints to the dance that they do on the piano.”

There’s one set for each “Aristocats” kitten. The smallest represents Marie.

“The closer you look, the more details you start to see,” Markfort said. “And then it extends even out into the corridor. We have the poster on the wall that’s the Thomas O’Malley house style, and actually, all of those cats are our team members’ cats.”

Walt Disney World fans should note the piano bar bears no relation to the New Orleans-inspired Scat Cat’s Club at Port Orleans Resort – French Quarter.

**Jumbeaux’s Sweets**

Guests will only find fictional animals in The Treasure’s “Zootopia”-inspired treat shop, Jumbeaux’s Sweets.

“When you have a place like Jumbeaux’s, even though it’s a small part of the film, it just makes perfect sense to bring it to life,” said Jay Abruzzese with Walt Disney Imagineering, who served as creative director for both Jumbeaux’s Sweets and Plaza de Coco.

There’s a whole Zootopia land in Shanghai Disney Resort, but for many guests, this may be their first time stepping into the story.

“To see a life-size Nick and a life-size Judy and get your photo with them, that’s really exciting,” he said.

Guests can’t miss the Nick Wilde and Judy Hopps statue front and center in the shop, but they’ll have to look and listen closer for other Easter eggs.

“When they walk in the space, you’ll hear the music, you’ll see Jumbeaux in the corner, keeping an eye out on all our crew,” Abruzzese said. “You’ll see the pawsicles. You’ll see the lemmings. You’ll see the elevator tube that the lemmings go in and out of, and then you also see they have their own little private entrance in the corner ... There’s just the little hidden details that we love to bring to life that only Disney can do.”

*The reporter on this story received access to the ship from Disney Cruise Line. USA TODAY maintains editorial control of reviews.*



# 50★States

**ALABAMA Montgomery:** The city confirmed Sunday that it experienced two tornadoes in the overnight hours, with damage concentrated in the Spring Valley neighborhood. The storms caused fallen trees and utility poles as well as debris in roadways across the area, and knocked out power to about 8,500 homes.

**ALASKA Juneau:** A police officer fatally shot a 30-year-old woman who refused to drop a hatchet following a call for help at a convenience store last week, KTUU reported.

**ARIZONA Phoenix:** A south Phoenix composting company whose operations created putrid odors that tormented neighbors for months had a history of shoddy business practices, legal records show.

**ARKANSAS Little Rock:** Former Arkansas Democratic gubernatorial candidate Chris Jones has announced his candidacy for vice chair at-large of the Democratic National Committee, KARK reported.

**CALIFORNIA Los Angeles:** A fire in downtown Los Angeles last week destroyed a historic building that had been immortalized on the cover of the 1970 album “Morrison Hotel,” by the rock band The Doors.

**COLORADO Fort Collins:** A nonprofit dedicated to wildlife rehabilitation and preservation is facing public scrutiny and a mass exodus of its board of directors after accusations of misconduct were made against its founder and director.

**CONNECTICUT Bristol:** Athena Health Care Systems announced that two nursing homes in Bristol are planned to be shut down, with a total of 431 employees set to be laid off, WFSB reported.

**DELAWARE Dagsboro:** The only operational unit of Delaware’s sole coal-fired power plant will shut down in February, nearly two years ahead of schedule. Indian River Unit 4 near Dagsboro originally was scheduled to shut down in 2026 while electrical grids were upgraded to ensure reliability, but regional grid manager PJM announced that the power plant’s unit can shut down 22 months early without causing adverse impacts on the grid’s reliability.

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington:** The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority announced that construction work along Metro stations downtown is wrapping up early after 10 days of repairs, DC News Now reported.

**FLORIDA Tallahassee:** The U.S. Department of Labor has awarded Florida \$1.5 million to help people in 21 counties affected by the opioid crisis. The money, a National Health Emergency Dislocated Worker Grant, will be used to create “disaster-relief positions to address the shortage of health and counseling services available to individuals impacted by the opioid crisis,” according to a Labor Department news release.

**GEORGIA Atlanta:** A new report from Hunger Free America found that 22.4% of children in Georgia – or 555,208 kids – live in households without enough food. Georgia now has the fourth highest rate of food insecurity among children in the nation.

**HAWAII Moanalua:** Hawaii Department of Transportation officials are investigating after an unauthorized message was posted on one of the digital boards on Moanalua Freeway near Moanalua Gardens on Sunday, KHON reported.

**IDAHO Twin Falls:** The state Department of Fish and Game announced that Filer Ponds will be stocked with roughly 900 rainbow trout this month, KTVB reported.

**ILLINOIS Springfield:** Illinois nearly 100 years ago could boast the highest national average for an entry level hourly wage, but it currently ranks close to last among other states. Coming from the top spot in 1935, Illinois now ranks 39th. Average entry level workers earn \$14.06 hourly in Illinois, but in 1935 they would have earned \$15.43 hourly with inflation adjustments.

**INDIANA Bloomington:** Monroe County Health Department wants to create a mobile health unit to provide vaccines, STD/HIV testing, blood pressure screenings, glucose testing, and maternal health counseling to communities in need. The unit would target rural areas with limited transportation to address lack of access to care in Monroe County.

## HIGHLIGHT: OKLAHOMA



State and tribal leaders oppose a power plant that would draw water from the Kiamichi River. PROVIDED BY THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

**Talihina:** A power plant set to be built in southeastern Oklahoma and that would draw water from the Kiamichi River is generating opposition from residents in the area, tribal leaders, state officials, lawmakers and members of Oklahoma’s congressional delegation. The plant, a \$3.1 billion project, would require construction of three reservoirs. According to documents filed with federal regulators, the hydropower plant would generate electricity through a 100-mile-long power line extending through Pushmataha and western McCurtain counties in Oklahoma and through Lamar and Red River counties in Texas.

**IOWA Des Moines:** Four hospitals in Iowa, including one in Des Moines, have been named among the high performers for maternity care in the United States by U.S. News & World Report. The four hospitals are Mercy Medical Center Cedar Rapids, MercyOne Birth Center Mason City, MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center and University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center.

**KANSAS Topeka:** In a study by WalletHub, all 50 states were ranked based on 52 key safety indicators, which were grouped into five different categories. WalletHub gave Kansas a total score of 45.79 on a 100-point scale, ranking No. 35 on the list of safest states.

**KENTUCKY Louisville:** A celebrated racehorse is among a group of 13 horses rescued from neglectful conditions in Franklin County and taken to Kentucky Humane Society’s horse facility Dec. 18, Kentucky Humane Society officials said.

**LOUISIANA Baton Rouge:** U.S. News & World Report released a list of the best companies to work for in 2024-2025, and one Louisiana company is deemed to be one of the best in the country. The best business to work for in Louisiana is Lamar, an advertising and media company in Baton Rouge.

**MAINE Scarborough:** Piper Shores, a nonprofit retirement community, has pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040 and eliminate fossil fuel use by 2045, News Center Maine reported.

**MARYLAND Baltimore:** Homelessness advocates claimed that two city-owned hotels that serve Baltimore’s homeless are failing to meet their needs, WBAL reported.

**MASSACHUSETTS Nantucket:** An iconic Nantucket landscape of rolling dunes and sheltered spits of land has gained recognition as a National Natural Landmark. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland last month announced the National Park Service’s designation of Nantucket Barrier Beach and Wildlife Refuge among U.S. natural landmarks.

**MICHIGAN Boyne City:** Charlevoix County is set to benefit from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board’s \$41.7 million statewide initiative, including a \$322,000 recommendation for the Boyne City Open Space Project. The downtown waterfront park’s transformation over the past six years will continue with this latest grant funding.

**MINNESOTA St. Paul:** One of the architects of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party’s historic 2023 legislative session, Sen. Kari Dziedzic of Minneapolis, died on Dec. 27 of ovarian cancer, Minnesota Reformer reported. She was 62.

**MISSISSIPPI Itta Bena:** The Mean Green marching band at Mississippi Valley State University has been invited to play in the inauguration parade for President-elect Donald Trump.

**MISSOURI Springfield:** In an end-of-year update, Missouri State University executive vice president Zora Mulligan said the 2025 enrollment projection is “not a very rosy picture” but there is room for optimism.

**MONTANA Billings:** The Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter has reported an influx of stray dogs after the holiday season, KTVQ reported.

**NEBRASKA Goehner:** Authorities said a man wanted by police in Texas in connection with a murder investigation was arrested in Nebraska, KOLN reported.

**NEVADA Sparks:** Two Sparks police officers were “justified and lawful under Nevada law” in a fatal 2022 shooting when responding to a domestic violence call, the Washoe County District Attorney’s office said.

**NEW HAMPSHIRE Concord:** New Hampshire will soon offer child care workers another incentive to stay in the field: temporary subsidies to help pay for their own children’s care. The assistance is aimed at workers who earn too much to qualify for New Hampshire’s existing child care subsidy but still struggle to afford child care, New Hampshire Public Radio reported.

**NEW JERSEY New Brunswick:** Hub City has been named “Jersey’s Best Destination of the Year” for 2025 by Jersey’s Best magazine. The award recognizes New Brunswick’s arts scene, cultural offerings, entertainment and dining options.

**NEW MEXICO Las Cruces:** 2024 was the deadliest year in Las Cruces’ history. Las Cruces Police Department said 15 people were murdered from January to November. In 2023, there were 10 homicides in Las Cruces, and seven in 2022. After a 30% decrease from 2022, the following year – 2023 to 2024 – represented an 88% increase.

**NEW YORK Albany:** New York state will fine fossil fuel companies a total of \$75 billion over the next 25 years to pay for damage caused to the climate under a bill Gov. Kathy Hochul signed into law. The law is intended to shift some of the recovery and adaptation costs of climate change from individual taxpayers to oil, gas and coal companies that the law says are liable.

**NORTH CAROLINA Carrboro:** Carrboro, an Orange County town close to Chapel Hill, charged Duke Energy of deceiving the public about climate change and allowing its ongoing operations and investments in new fossil fuel-powered plants to help further warm the planet. That, in turn, has and will cost the town millions of dollars in dealing with extreme weather events and negatively impacts its residents’ health and quality of life.

**NORTH DAKOTA Bismarck:** The North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources announced that a massive supply of untapped oil was discovered across a portion of western North Dakota, KXNET reported.

**OHIO Canton:** The Canton Palace Theatre is halfway to its goal of raising \$16.3 million for an expansion project to mark the historic venue’s 100th anniversary. And if the Palace can raise the remainder of the funds, construction on a bigger stage and loading dock area will begin in January 2026, said Georgia Paxos, executive director of the nonprofit theater.

**OREGON Eugene:** After a drop in participation following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Student Union at Willamette High School is reorienting itself, making big investments and encouraging community interaction. Over the summer, the club took seven students to Washington, D.C., the first trip of its kind for the school. Since then, BSU adviser and WHS history teacher Nate Jackson said there’s been increased interest in the club and more members.

**PENNSYLVANIA Philadelphia:** BioNTech has entered into two separate settlement agreements with the U.S. National Institutes of Health and the University of Pennsylvania over the payment of royalties related to its COVID-19 vaccine, the company said in filings. The German company, which partners with U.S. drugmaker Pfizer for its COVID-19 vaccine, said it would pay \$791.5 million to the agency to resolve a default notice. Separately, the company will pay \$467 million to the University of Pennsylvania, which has agreed to dismiss a lawsuit brought against the vaccine maker accusing it of underpaying royalties.

**RHODE ISLAND Providence:** As feared, the hackers who breached Rhode Island’s expansive, Deloitte-run public benefits computer system RIBridges have released “at least some” files to a site on the dark web, the governor’s office disclosed.

**SOUTH CAROLINA Sumter:** An investigation is underway after authorities found skeletal human remains in a vacant building last week in Sumter County, WLTX reported.

**SOUTH DAKOTA Rapid City:** The federal government approved a 20-year ban on new mining-related activity in a portion of South Dakota’s Black Hills, South Dakota Searchlight reported.

**TENNESSEE Nashville:** Tennesseans remain at odds with Republican lawmakers on policies around firearms and cannabis access, a new Vanderbilt University poll found, even though approval for state lawmakers has increased. A majority of both Republicans and Democrats polled post-election support recreational marijuana legalization and some gun safety reform, such as requiring gun owners to report a stolen gun or temporarily restricting gun access for some individuals deemed a risk.

**TEXAS Austin:** Texas is the most dangerous state for motorcyclists, according to highway crash data. There were 12.1 crashes for every 10,000 motorcyclists in the Lone Star State, according to 2022 crash data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that was compiled in a study by Murphy & Prachthauser, a personal injury law firm based in Wisconsin. Texas’ rate is almost twice the national average of 6.2 crashes per 10,000 motorcyclists.

**UTAH Layton:** Police said a large amount of counterfeit cash was discovered at a Walmart and are urging the community to check their \$20 bills, KSL reported.

**VERMONT South Burlington:** Police said a suspect has been arrested after the University Mall in South Burlington was vandalized, WCAX reported.

**VIRGINIA Staunton:** A Middle River Regional Jail inmate who attacked and injured another inmate last year while hiding behind a shower wall was given a four-year prison term.

**WASHINGTON Bremerton:** During one of the largest chum salmon runs to Chico Creek over the past two decades, around 200 dead fish were discovered on a shoreline near Naval Hospital in Bremerton, in a suspected poaching that is under investigation.

**WEST VIRGINIA Charleston:** The state Department of Human Services reported that the state has seen a significant decline in overdose deaths, WV News reported.

**WISCONSIN Brown County:** Overdose fatalities in Brown County decreased by 73% between 2023 and 2024, the result of increased efforts to address fentanyl and other drugs in the community, County Executive Troy Streckenbach said.

**WYOMING Teton County:** The U.S. Department of the Interior and the Grand Teton National Park Foundation announced that the federal government purchased the 640-acre Kelly Parcel school section for \$100 million, WyoFile reported.  
*From USA TODAY Network and wire reports*





Penn State wide receiver Omari Evans makes a touchdown catch over Boise State safety Ty Benefield during the first half of the Fiesta Bowl on Tuesday night at State Farm Stadium. MARK J. REBILAS/IMAGN IMAGES



Texas' Andrew Mukuba intercepts a pass intended for Arizona State's Melquan Stovall to finish off the Longhorns' Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl OT win Wednesday. BUTCH DILL/GETTY IMAGES

# Bourbon St. tragedy postpones Sugar Bowl

Notre Dame, Georgia now will play Thursday

Mark Giannotto  
USA TODAY

The College Football Playoff quarterfinal game at the Sugar Bowl has been postponed after at least 10 people were killed and more than 30 people were injured early Wednesday morning in New Orleans when an armed man drove a pickup into a large crowd on Bourbon Street in an attack.

Jeff Hundley, the Sugar Bowl committee CEO, announced that the game will be played Thursday after consultation with officials from all parties involved. "All agree it's in the best interest of everybody and public safety that we postpone the game," he said.

No. 2 seed Georgia and No. 7 Notre Dame were originally scheduled to kick off at 8:45 p.m. ET on Wednesday. The two teams will now play at 4 ET on Thursday and the winner advances to face No. 6 seed Penn State on Jan. 9 in the Orange Bowl semifinals game.

"There's just too much stuff we don't know. It's just not worth it," Louisiana Sen. John Neely Kennedy said during a news conference with state, city and law enforcement officials, addressing the decision to postpone.

The incident in New Orleans happened about 3:15 a.m. Wednesday, according to the city's emergency responders, a little over 16 hours before Notre Dame and Georgia were previously scheduled to begin their quarterfinal matchup less than a mile away at the Caesars Superdome. The driver was driving at a high speed and within moments started firing on police officers from inside the vehicle, according to New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick.

USA TODAY confirmed with New Orleans police that the driver was fatally shot by police. The FBI said in an initial statement Wednesday it was "working with our partners to investigate this as an act of terrorism." Federal law enforcement officials said an ISIS flag, weapons and a potential IED were located in the subject's vehicle. Potential IEDs were also located in the French Quarter, according to the FBI.

Kirkpatrick said initially that the Sugar Bowl game would be played as scheduled. Bill Cassidy, a Republican U.S. senator in Louisiana, also told CNN in an interview Wednesday that he was "extremely confident" the Sugar Bowl game would be played.

"The standard operating procedure for a big game like the Sugar Bowl, for a Saints game, for the Super Bowl is to go through the building, make sure there's nothing there that's wrong, and then to lock it down," Cassidy said. "The Sugar Bowl, the Super Dome has been locked down. There is going to be no problem there."

University of Georgia president Jere Morehead announced one of the victims who was critically injured in the early morning act of violence was a Georgia student. Notre Dame said it was "working with law enforcement and others to determine the full scope and impact of the tragedy."

# PLAYOFF SEMIS NEXT

## Fiesta: Penn State ousts Boise

Paul Myerberg  
USA TODAY

No. 6 Penn State held Ashton Jeanty in check and overcame some questionable play-calling on offense to beat No. 3 Boise State 31-14 on New Year's Eve in the quarterfinals of the College Football Playoff.

The Nittany Lions advance to the playoff semifinals against Thursday's winner between No. 2 Georgia and No. 7 Notre Dame in the Sugar Bowl game.

The key in the Fiesta Bowl was simple: Penn State had to be the first team this season to bottle up Jeanty, the runner-up for the Heisman Trophy, while controlling the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball.

Those efforts took a big hit with the loss of star defensive end Abdul Carter, an All-American pick who left the game in the second quarter due to an apparent arm injury and didn't return.

On the offensive side, the Penn State front struggled to contain the Broncos' edge rushers and create a clean pocket for quarterback Drew Allar.

See PENN STATE, Page 4C

## Peach: Texas blows lead, rallies

Paul Myerberg  
USA TODAY

Quinn Ewers stepped up in overtime and helped No. 5 Texas pull out a thrilling 39-31 win against No. 4 Arizona State on Wednesday in the Peach Bowl College Football Playoff quarterfinals.

Ewers finished with 322 passing yards and four total touchdowns for the Longhorns, who led 14-0 early in the first quarter after a 75-yard punt return for a score by Silas Bolden but were held out of rhythm by the Sun Devils' ball-control offense.

Arizona State held possession for nearly 38 minutes of regulation and ran 94 total plays for 495 yards, including 20 plays in the third quarter to the Longhorns' five. Texas gained 375 yards on 60 plays and had just 53 rushing yards on 30 carries.

The Longhorns led 24-8 five minutes into the fourth quarter after Ewers scrambled for a short touchdown run.

The ASU game plan eventually wore on Texas, however, helping the Sun Devils even the score at 24-24 after a 42-yard TD pass by running back Cam Skattebo with 6:31 left in the fourth quarter and a

See TEXAS, Page 4C

# Arch Manning, Paige Bueckers among the athletes who are poised for superstardom in '25

Tom Schad  
USA TODAY

With each passing year, another wave of up-and-coming athletes across the world of sports have breakout seasons, emerging into all-out stars.

In 2024, it was Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese making their first WNBA All-Star appearances as rookies. Paul Skenes making his MLB debut with the Pittsburgh Pirates. Or even Washington Commanders quarterback Jayden Daniels emerging as a fringe MVP candidate.

Now, who will be the breakout sports

stars of 2025?

Here are 10 athletes that USA TODAY Sports staff writers identified as being poised for a big year in 2025 – including some up-and-comers who could become stars and a few young phenoms who could ascend into superstardom.

## Soon-to-be WNBA guard Paige Bueckers

On its face, it might seem like a bit of a stretch to include Bueckers on this list, given her track record of collegiate

See 2025 ATHLETES, Page 4C



UConn Huskies guard Paige Bueckers (5) drives the ball against Southern California Trojans guard JuJu Watkins at XL Center. Bueckers is on our USA TODAY Sports list of breakout athletes for 2025. DAVID BUTLER II/IMAGN IMAGES



# Schauffele hopes to wedge way closer to No. 1

Adam Schupak  
Golfweek | USA TODAY NETWORK

KAPALUA, Hawaii – One of Xander Schauffele’s goals is to get to world No. 1. Sitting in his path at the top of the mountain for the 85th straight week since assuming the position on May 21, 2023, is Scottie Scheffler, who has built a significant gap between Schauffele, his nearest competitor.

Schauffele studied the numbers during the offseason and realized that despite winning two majors in 2024, he is closer to the 30th ranking player, who he wasn’t aware happens to be Maverick McNealy, than he is to Scheffler.

“Hat’s off to Scottie,” Schauffele said on Tuesday in his pre-tournament press conference ahead of the Sentry. “He’s a beast.”

Added Schauffele: “He just kept winning, even in sort of his downtime, he won another event (Hero World Challenge in December), which pushed him even further away. So it’s one of my goals that will just have to stay on the calendar for a few more years ... it’s going to take some time and some patience.”

But Schauffele, who won at Kapalua’s Plantation Course in 2019, can make a dent this week into his deficit as Scheffler was forced to withdraw from the tournament after injuring the palm of his right hand from a broken glass while preparing dinner on Christmas Day.

“Small glass fragments remained in the palm which required surgery,” Scheffler’s manager Blake Smith said via the PGA Tour on Friday.

Schauffele expressed his dismay at the news and wished Scheffler, his teammate on the recent victorious U.S. Presidents Cup team in the fall, a speedy recovery.

“It’s weird, because we’re competitors, but at the same time he’s such a nice guy. I just hope he’s fine,” Schauffele said. “We’re a lot better off with him here in Hawaii than not, so hopefully he gets a full recovery and he’s fine.”

Schauffele noted that it’s doubly difficult to try to chase down a guy like Scheffler that he finds hard not to like and who was the last person anyone would have expected to end up spend-



**Xander Schauffele, shown on New Year's Eve preparing in Kapalua, Hawaii, for The Sentry, had reason to smile in 2024 after winning two of the four men's majors in the PGA Championship and the British Open.**

MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

ing the morning before the second round of the 2024 PGA Championship in a jail cell but that turned out to be the case.

“I really can’t say anything bad about him, honestly, especially after what happened to him last year. I think the true colors show when you’re facing a bad spot, like when he got arrested. So he’s a 10 out of 10 guy in my opinion,” Schauffele said. “So I got to try and hate him somehow. So if I put him at the very top of the mountain, and he’s someone that I need to catch, then maybe that’s how I have to put it in my head.”

Part of Schauffele’s emergence into Scheffler’s closest competitor for world No. 1 resulted from swing changes that

Schauffele worked on last offseason when he hired Chris Como to be his swing coach. He improved his distance off the tee but there was a trade-off.

“My wedge play sucked. It was really bad. Really, really bad,” he explained. “With my club pitched a little bit more vertical in my back swing it’s not catering to the best – it’s great for driver, great for long irons, the stats show that – then, with wedges it’s, you know, the club’s moving around a little bit, it’s not ideal for hitting like a distance wedge.

“It’s something I’m trying to work on, still working on it now, still trying to figure it out, get the right feel for it. When my shoulders were a lot flatter, the club was way more laid off and shut, and I was more rotational. I was a really, really good wedge player, really good inside 150. And then the club is moving a different way, up more even across, and now all of a sudden I can, you know, smoke my driver and a 4-iron, but all of a sudden, like a 90-yard wedge is a little bit, at times.

“So just trying to figure that out.”

And that’s not the only area of his game where Schauffele sees room for improvement. “Around the greens, short game, that’s an area that’s not bad, just good enough. Those are some spots where I could improve, for sure,” he said.

All of Schauffele’s career wins have come in spurts: two in two months in 2017, two within a few months of each other in the 2018-19 season, three in a three-month span in 2022, and his twin majors in May 2024 at the PGA Championship and July 2024 at the British Open.

How does he plan to avoid another drought in between his wins? Schauffele didn’t seem too concerned that PGA Tour victory No. 10 wouldn’t be far off.

“They stack up when you’re focused on the little things. I think that’s what the best players do is you focus on practicing and prepping the right way, and then you focus on small shots with your caddie, and then at the end of the day you give yourself a chance on the back nine,” he said. “In those moments is sort of when you’ll feel a little bit more heat and if you’re comfortable or not to close. That takes a little bit of practice, and luckily I got a little bit last year.”

## PGA Tour: The Sentry

Course: Plantation Course at Kapalua on Maui in Hawaii (Par: 73; Yardage: 7,596)

TV: 6-10 p.m. ET Thursday and Friday, on Golf Channel; Saturday and Sunday, 4-6 p.m. ET (NBC) and 6-8 p.m. ET (Golf Channel)

Golf Channel’s pairing highlights coverage: Thursday will feature Sahith Theegala, Tony Finau and Max Homa (4:27 p.m. ET tee off); and Justin Thomas, Hideki Matsuyama and Adam Scott (4:39 p.m. ET). Friday will feature Collin Morikawa, Sam Burns and Patrick Cantlay (4:27 p.m. ET); and Xander Schauffele, Wyndham Clark and Ludvig Aberg (4:39 p.m. ET).

## Stat

### 477

That was the distance that Max Homa’s tee shot traveled at the seventh hole at Kapalua Resort’s Plantation Course, the longest drive of the 2024 season. “I do like to tell people I hit the ball that far. Sounds cool,” Homa said on Monday. “I tell everybody it was uphill, into the wind, it was snowing. It rolled for a good probably 40 seconds, so I’ll take it.”

## Keep an eye on ...

- Ludvig Aberg. There was no sophomore slump last year for the Swedish sensation, but he did fail to get into the winner’s circle. Expect that to change in a hurry in 2025.
- Patrick Cantlay. He’s been stuck on eight PGA Tour titles since the 2022 BMW Championship and dropped out of the top 10 in the Official World Golf Ranking. It’s a Ryder Cup year and he desperately wants back on the U.S. side to help win back the Cup.
- Justin Thomas. His winless drought is even longer than Cantlay’s, dating to the PGA Championship in May 2022. But Thomas wrapped up 2024 with a runner-up finish at the Zozo Championship and a third place at the Hero World Challenge. He also enjoys great success at Kapalua: twice a winner at the Sentry (2017, 2020) and has two third-place finishes (2019, 2021).



**Eagles running back Saquon Barkley runs with the football during the second quarter against the Cowboys on Sunday at Lincoln Financial Field.**

ERIC HARTLINE/IMAGN IMAGES

# No new NFL rushing record: Eagles to sit star Barkley in finale

Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz  
USA TODAY

Saquon Barkley won’t get a chance to break the NFL single-season rushing record after all.

The Philadelphia Eagles running back won’t play in the team’s Week 18 game against the New York Giants, coach Nick Sirianni announced Wednesday. The Eagles are already locked into the No. 2 seed in the NFC playoffs.

Sirianni said other starters would also sit out the contest Sunday.

Barkley has 2,005 rushing yards on the season, leaving him 101 short of breaking the single-season record Eric Dickerson set in 1984. With 167 yards on a season-high 31 carries last weekend in a 41-7 win over the Dallas Cowboys, Barkley became the ninth running back in NFL history to eclipse 2,000 yards.

Sirianni was noncommittal after the game about whether Barkley would play in the regular-season finale, saying he would consult Eagles brass and players before making a decision. Barkley said he would be content however the coach chose to proceed.

“Whatever his decision is, I’m all for it,” Barkley said. “If his mindset is, we’ll go out there and try it, I’ll go out there and try it. If his mindset is, let’s rest and get ready for this run, I’m all for that, too. ... I came here to do something special. Breaking a record is special, but I want a banner up there. I think we all do.”

Dickerson told USA TODAY Sports’ Jarrett Bell this week that he was still hoping Barkley would fall short of the record so he could maintain his place in NFL history.

“These people who say ‘records are meant to be broken,’ you ain’t got no record,” Dickerson told Bell. “You don’t have one. When you get those records, you want to hang on to them. No matter if it was in bowling and you had 30 strikes in a row, you don’t want nobody to break that.”

Barkley has 2,005 rushing yards on 345 carries this season, which are both personal and NFL bests, along with 13 rushing touchdowns.

The seventh-year veteran also has 33 catches for 278 receiving yards. He also leads the league in yards from scrimmage with 2,283 and touches with 378.

USA TODAY

# Wine Club



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2025 IN SPORTS

# Bold predictions for players, teams



Gabe Lacques  
USA TODAY

Travis Kelce will catch the rock. But will he present one to his lover? The hoodie is back. But how long will Bill Belichick be for Chapel Hill? Paige Bueckers will call her shots. But will she be getting them up in Dallas? A first glance at 2025 reveals a year that may zag just after it zigs, that’s about as hard to pin down as a former Green Bay Packer quarterback’s career plans. Stick with it, though, and you will be surprised – pleasantly or otherwise. With that, USA TODAY Sports reporters and editors offer up their bold predictions for the coming year, one heavy on the usual (LeBron discourse) and unusual (King Kirk Herbstreit?):

2025 in sports predictions

*(via USA TODAY Sports staff)*

- **LeBron James will retire:** After turning 40, and finally achieving his dream of sharing an NBA court with his son Bronny, the future Hall of Famer will decide to walk away at the end of the season.
- **Arch Manning will win the Heisman Trophy:** And, in the process, become the first Manning to do so. (Archie, Peyton and Eli were all finalists at some point in their college careers but never won it.)
- **Paige Bueckers does not end up with the Dallas Wings:** Just as Caitlin Clark was the foregone conclusion to be the No. 1 pick in this year’s draft, Bueckers is the gimme for No. 1 in 2025. But Dallas is not exactly a prime WNBA destination, and Bueckers is one of the few players with the leverage to say she doesn’t want to go there. Whether that means she stays at UConn for a sixth year (she has another year of eligibility because of COVID and injuries) or she forces a trade will be the question.
- **The Mets will miss the playoffs after committing \$765 million to Juan Soto:** Soto will enjoy a fine debut season in Queens, but the Mets can’t recapture 2024’s magic and finish third in the NL East with a shaky pitching staff – in the first of the slugger’s 15 years under contract.
- **The Detroit Lions will FINALLY make it to the Super Bowl:** But then lose to Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs, who will become the first team in the Super Bowl era to three-peat.



This is LeBron James’ 22nd year. Will he play a 23rd? GARY A. VASQUEZ/IMAGN IMAGES

- **Bill Belichick will go back to the NFL:** A moderately successful debut season at North Carolina will put Belichick back on the radar of NFL teams, and he’ll decide that the necessary politicking of college football is just not for him.
- **Aaron Rodgers retires, and then comes back to play:** He couldn’t be more like Brett Favre if he tried. After his time with the Jets didn’t pan out, Rodgers calls it quits on his career... until some team comes calling and he misses being in the spotlight.
- **Michael Vick and Norfolk State beat Rutgers:** In his first year as head coach, Vick and the FCS Spartans pick up a shocking road win over a Big Ten opponent. The former No. 1 overall pick’s name begins getting floated for every major job opening.
- **LeBron James retires after being traded back to the Cavaliers:** ... Who he helps win their second NBA championship.
- **Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce announce engagement:** This sets off hysteria among the Dads, Brads and Chads (and Tony Dungy), who are incensed they will continue having to see the pop superstar for 20 seconds during a 3½-hour game.
- **Mikaela Shiffrin gets her 100th World Cup victory:** An unfathomable mark that is unlikely to ever be equaled. (This isn’t a stretch; she’s at 99.)
- **Bill Belichick’s North Carolina Tar Heels will play a bowl game in a baseball stadium:** That’d be the Pinstripe Bowl at Yankee Stadium or the Fenway Bowl in Boston – not unlike the conclusion of almost every UNC football season. On to 161st Street ...
- **The L.A. Dodgers win 117 games:** One more than the record-setting 2001

Seattle Mariners and 17 as in, you know, the jersey number of that guy who will be returning to the mound in 2025.

- **Nobody cares about the Club World Cup:** Set in the United States a year before the 2026 World Cup, FIFA made sure to reverse-engineer its newest tournament to include (wring the last few dollars out of) the nearly-38-year-old Lionel Messi, and features an eye-popping \$100 million prize for the winning team. But the 32-club showcase goes on in front of largely disinterested American stadiums with top players complaining about more cash-grab games added to a calendar lacking an offseason.
- **Coach Prime gets QB controversy:** Deion Sanders signs a long-term contract at Colorado, but a quarterback controversy erupts during his first season without his quarterback son She-deur, who goes No. 1 in the NFL draft. Blue-chip QB recruit Julian Lewis came to Boulder to play right away. So did Liberty transfer Kaidon Salter, who has one year of eligibility left. What does Coach Prime do about it? He plays both of them, and the Buffaloes get a playoff berth.
- **No MLS Cup for Messi:** Lionel Messi has won 46 trophies for club and country, but one major honor has eluded him after two seasons in the U.S.: The MLS Cup. And, in 2025, Messi and Inter Miami will come up short again of attaining Major League Soccer’s biggest prize.
- **Chiefs do not win third straight Super Bowl:** Not since Lombardi’s Packers has a team won three consecutive NFL titles, but one of those championships came before the advent of the Super Bowl. Far better teams than this year’s Chiefs – 1994 Dallas Cowboys,

1990 San Francisco 49ers, 1976 Pittsburgh Steelers, 1974 Miami Dolphins come to mind – couldn’t do it. Kansas City will be the latest to fall short of Super Bowl three-peat glory.

- **South Carolina women win another basketball title:** The Gamebacks go back to back, the program’s third championship in four years
- **Phil Jackson to the rescue:** Phil Jackson comes out of retirement to solve the Lakers’ problems. LeBron James announces the triangle is his least-favorite shape. They opt for a hexagon-inspired offense, and madness ensues.
- **Woj does not bomb:** The St. Bonaventure men’s basketball team reaches the Final Four for the first time since 1970 for a very obvious reason: Adrian Wojnarowski makes all the right moves in his first year as the team’s general manager.
- **After sitting out 2024 WNBA season, two-time MVP Elena Delle Donne returns in a big way:** Delle Donne teams up with Caitlin Clark and Aliyah Boston in Indiana after the Fever pull off a massive sign-and-trade with the Washington Mystics.
- **Herbstreit perfects CFP format:** Tired of the criticism about which teams should be in the College Football Playoff, the selection committee decides to let ESPN analyst Kirk Herbstreit pick the teams instead. He scraps the selection rules and fills the bracket with Ohio State, Colorado and 10 teams from the Southeastern Conference based on the strength of their schedules (not wins). All first-round games then go to overtime. But criticism about the selection process fails to die down, prompting Herbstreit to blame fringe fans and social media for ruining college football.
- **Liverpool wins English Premier League:** Five years after COVID spoiled celebrations for the club’s first title in three decades, Liverpool fights off a late push to win the league in its first year under manager Arne Slot.
- **Tyler Reddick takes Daytona 500:** In the midst of their antitrust lawsuit against NASCAR, 23XI Racing co-owners Michael Jordan and Denny Hamlin dunk on the auto racing series again when their driver Tyler Reddick kicks off the 2025 season by winning NASCAR’s most iconic race, the Daytona 500.
- **Ethan Holliday joins brother as No. 1 overall pick in MLB draft:** Three years after Jackson was the top pick up the road in Baltimore, the Nationals select Ethan at No. 1 in 2025. The sons of All-Star Matt Holliday join the Mannings as the only brothers to be taken first overall.

## QB question start of fiery debate for Pro Hall of Fame



Jarrett Bell  
Columnist  
USA TODAY

Is Eli Manning a Hall of Famer? Maybe. Maybe not. Yet despite earning zero All-Pro selections to go with the two upset Super Bowl triumphs against the so-called Evil Empire led by Tom Brady and Bill Belichick, the former New York Giants quarterback is a finalist in his first year of eligibility. The Pro Football Hall of Fame unveiled the list of 15 modern-era finalists over the weekend, with Manning’s presence to likely fuel the most intense debate facing the 49 selectors who will determine the Class of 2025 in January. Full-disclosure: As a member of the selection committee, this is not an effort to sway fellow voters. Looking forward to engaging in the passionate discussion. But oh, brother. Another question: Is Darren Woodson a Hall of Famer? The former safety won three Super Bowls during the 1990s with the Dallas Cowboys and earned four first-team All-Pro selections. He’s the franchise’s all-time leading tackler. And Woodson is in his 17th year of eligibility, which puts him so close to entering the deep seniors pool, which happens when former players don’t get in after 20 years as a modern era candidate. See, this can be so tricky. Rodney Harrison won two Super Bowls with the New England Patriots, is one of two players in NFL history with 30 interceptions and 30 sacks. He was a finalist the past three years. But he didn’t make the final 15 this time. Earl Thomas won a Super Bowl, ap-

peared in another with the Seattle Seahawks and, like Luke Kuechly, was a first-team All-Decade selection who earned seven Pro Bowl bids and seven All-Pro selections. Yet Thomas didn’t advance as a finalist. Kuechly did. Hmmm. Kuechly’s advance should set the table one day for fellow All-Decade linebacker Bobby Wagner, who is still playing. We’ll see. Also missing the cut from the list of 25 semifinalists: Richmond Webb, an All-Decade left tackle who protected Dan Marino’s blind side; James Harrison, two-time Super Bowl champ and former NFL Defensive Player of the Year; Hines Ward, again, for the ninth year in a row, as the latest version of a wide receiver logjam that is a lot tougher than beating press coverage. Of course, highlighting omissions doesn’t diminish the worthiness of the finalists. Yet it underscores how competitive the process is for settling on many of the Hall of Fame slots. The ultimate prize, as the legendary Deacon Jones once explained, is that getting enshrined in Canton is making the team that you can never get cut from. Yet surviving the gauntlet to get a bronze bust can be so challenging for some undeniably worthy candidates. The new slate again includes former wideouts Torry Holt and Reggie Wayne, back as six-time finalists, while ex-defensive end Jared Allen returns as a five-time finalist with 136 career sacks. Willie Anderson, the former right tackle, is a fourth-time finalist. Jahri Evans and Eric Allen are second-time finalists, but here’s a twist: Evans, a well-credentialed former guard, is in his third year of eligibility. Meanwhile, Eric Allen, a former cornerback whose 54 interceptions ranks 21st all time, is in his 19th year of eligibility. The clock is ticking.

Antonio Gates is back, too, for his second time as a finalist. With his 116 career receiving touchdowns the most of any tight end in history, it’s fair to wonder why the ex-Charger wasn’t a first-ballot pick last year. I’d suspect the PED suspension (four games, 2015) hurt Gates, although a similar blemish didn’t stop Julius Peppers from getting in on the first ballot. That can be baffling to understand. Maybe it’s simply a numbers game. And timing. I mean, Michael Strahan didn’t get selected until his second year of eligibility, while Brian Urlacher was a first-ballot pick. One pattern keeps coming back: recency bias. Of the 15 finalists, five are first-ballot candidates: Manning, Kuechly, Terrell Suggs, Adam Vinatieri and Marshal Yanda. Not saying that any (or most) are not worthy, but what’s the rush? Then again, if I’m a candidate, there’s a rush because the influx of new candidates next year and the year after will bring another round of recency bias. The moral: If the Hall induction doesn’t happen fast for any given candidate, good luck. There are only so many slots (or so few) each year. Yeah, it’s supposed to be tough to get in. It’s not the Hall of the Very Good. But it can still be so subjective. Great stats, Pro Bowl selections and All-Decade status surely boost the cases of any candidate. But when there are several other candidates with similar symbols of achievement, it can be a wash – or at least much tougher to separate the best from the greatest ever. This is my 27th year as a selector. It has been a tremendous honor, taken so seriously. When I was invited by the Hall to join the committee, I thought it would be easy.

Not quite. And not just because of the campaigning inherent with the process. Sure, it’s been easy to cast votes for some of the no-brainer picks. I’ll never forget the “discussion” on one candidate, when Ira Miller, the selector presenting the case, stood up and announced to the room: “Ladies and gentlemen, I present Joe Montana.” Then Ira sat down. That was the discussion. Other candidates with similarly short presentations: Bruce Smith. Jerry Rice. Dan Marino. Emmitt Smith. Deion Sanders. Ronnie Lott. Yet most of the candidates are vetted with deep discussion – and sometimes intense debate – during our marathon selection meeting before the Super Bowl week unveiling of the new class. As great as Lawrence Taylor was, for instance, his Hall of Fame call didn’t come without some serious back-and-forth. Surely, some heated discussion is coming with Manning. He comes from football royalty and slayed the Patriots twice in the big game, but it’s a team game and individual honor. Never mind that Manning gamed the NFL draft system to shun the Chargers and land in the Big Apple. That’s not a factor for Hall consideration. That he was never one of the league’s best quarterbacks, though, is indeed a factor. If Manning is a Hall of Famer, then what about Jim Plunkett? Plunkett – ironically drafted No. 1 overall in 1971, one slot ahead of Eli’s father, Archie – won two Super Bowls, too, with the Raiders. But recency bias or not, Plunkett has never been discussed in the room as a finalist. Chances are, though, that he will be mentioned in context with the Manning case. Let the debate roll on.



# Gruden’s emails should lead to permanent NFL ban



**Mike Freeman**  
Columnist  
USA TODAY

This is a reminder. Call it a public service announcement for teams reportedly interested in Jon Gruden. This is a reminder of what Gruden said. A reminder of how ugly it was.

Apparently, people need this reminder. Teams need it. Maybe many of you might, too. So here’s the reminder. Please bookmark it because in these coming months you will likely hear Gruden’s name a lot, and this reminder needs to be front and center of all these conversations.

It was reported in 2021 by The Wall Street Journal that Gruden used a racist trope in an email about then union head DeMaurice Smith. This is what Gruden wrote about Smith, who is Black: “Dumboriss Smith has lips the size of michellin tires.”

Gruden’s emails also contained anti-gay and misogynistic messages. Gru-

den apologized but it wasn’t enough. The totality of the emails was so bad that he would resign from the Raiders a short time later.

What Gruden said about Smith relied on a racist trope that goes back centuries, and just as important as the racist email itself, Gruden said it believing no one would ever see his words. This was unfiltered Gruden. This was ugly, nasty work.

“All I can say is that I’m not a racist,” Gruden said at the time. “I can’t tell you how sick I am. I apologize again to De Smith, but I feel good about who I am and what I’ve done my entire life. I apologize for the insensitive remarks. I had no racial intentions with those remarks at all. But... yes, they can... I’m not like that at all. I apologize but I don’t want to keep addressing it.”

*I’m not racist but I used a really racist phrase.*

Why do NFL teams need this reminder? Because Gruden is drawing interest from teams to become a head coach again. I believe this interest is serious. I believe it is extensive. I believe it is real.

The NFL Network’s Tom Pelissero reported on Tuesday that NFL teams are doing extensive research on Gruden.

“Keep an eye on Jon Gruden,” Pelissero said to Peter Schrager. “We have not seen Gruden on a full-time basis in the NFL since back in 2021, when he resigned after offensive emails were leaked to the media that he had sent while working as an analyst at ESPN. However, he has remained engaged. We saw him on the sidelines with the Bucs owners earlier this fall. We saw him with the Saints back in training camp last year. My understanding is, if he had wanted the Saints’ offensive coordinator job last year, he could have had it. He ultimately decided he was not going to do that.

“What I can tell you though, Peter, it’s not to say for sure Jon Gruden will be back,” Pelissero said. “But there are multiple teams who are doing extensive homework on Jon Gruden, the situation, him as a coach, him as a person. I would not be surprised at all if, in the coming weeks, you see Jon Gruden’s name popping up interview-

ing for a head coaching job.”

Teams will rationalize their interest by saying time has passed. Or they’ll speak to people of color who will vouch for Gruden. Or the old standby: Gruden has grown as a person. They won’t care about the massive damage Gruden caused. They will only care that he’s a good coach. They’ll say he should be forgiven.

Forgive? I’ll leave that to popes and saints (and not the football ones from New Orleans). Teams can do whatever the hell they want but that doesn’t mean people who believe in decency should put what Gruden did behind us.

Yes, it’s true, there are bad people in the NFL (and even more really good people). But Gruden was a *leader*. He was a head coach. There’s just a different level of accountability and responsibility for people in his position.

There are simply lines that shouldn’t be crossed. Gruden did. Thinking no one was looking. There’s no coming back from that.

So, yes, this is a reminder. A lot of us haven’t forgotten. We never will.

Nor should we.

## Penn State

Continued from Page 1C

Even without Carter supplying pressure, lessening Jeanty’s impact put the focus on Boise State quarterback Maddux Madsen, who completed 23 of 35 throws for 304 yards and a touchdown with three interceptions.

While unable to keep Jeanty completely under wraps, the Nittany Lions were able to contain the junior All-

American selection. Jeanty finished with 104 yards on 30 carries with a long of 26 yards.

He had gone for at least 125 yards in every game during the regular season and was only 132 yards shy of breaking Barry Sanders’ single-season rushing record. The Nittany Lions were the first Football Bowl Subdivision opponent to keep Jeanty out of the end zone.

Penn State’s running game chewed up 216 yards on 41 carries, led by Kaytron Allen’s game-high 134 yards, though the offense spent too much time ignoring

the ground attack and keeping the ball in Allar’s hands.

Under pressure from the Broncos’ strong pass rush, Allar went 13 of 25 for 171 yards with three touchdowns. Allar avoided any interceptions but did cough up a fumble, recovered by the Broncos. The Nittany Lions leaned on star tight end Tyler Warren, who had 63 receiving yards and two scores despite being the primary focus of attention from Boise State’s back seven.

In addition to the eyebrow-raising decision to shy away from an effective

running game, Penn State was hampered by a series of strange decisions on key downs. The inability to put together sustained drives allowed the Broncos to stay in the game.

For the Nittany Lions, the win joins a 38-10 victory against SMU in the opening round.

Along with several impressive results against Power Four leagues in traditional bowl games, these two wins support the Big Ten’s case for being seen as the top conference in the Football Bowl Subdivision.

## Texas

Continued from Page 1C

short Skattebo scoring run with five minutes remaining.

After a controversial non-call on a potential targeting penalty against Texas forced Arizona State to punt with just over a minute left, the Longhorns took possession at their 20-yard line and went 61 yards in eight plays to set up kicker Bert Auburn’s 38-yard field goal attempt as time expired.

But after he missed a longer attempt earlier in the fourth quarter, Auburn’s try dinked off the left upright to force extra frames.

The Sun Devils scored on another

Skattebo touchdown run on their first overtime possession, with the drive extended on a key fourth-down conversion on a sneak from quarterback Sam Leavitt and his 16-yard run on third down to set up first-and-goal.

Texas’ overtime possession began with an incomplection, a run for no gain, a short gain on a completion on the left sideline and a false-start penalty. But needing 13 yards to convert on fourth down, Ewers laid a pass over the top of the Arizona State defense to Matthew Golden for a 28-yard touchdown to even the score at 31-31.

Starting on offense in the second frame, Ewers hit tight end Gunnar Helm for a 25-yard score on the first play and then found Golden for the two-point conversion to go ahead 39-31.

The Sun Devils’ second possession ended with Leavitt intercepted by Texas defensive back Andrew Mukuba, sealing the win.

The Longhorns will next face the winner of the Rose Bowl between Oregon and Ohio State, which was played later Wednesday.

Defensively, the Longhorns focused on slowing down Skattebo, who entered the playoff ranked fifth in the Bowl Subdivision in rushing yards per game.

Skattebo was held in check for the first half but began to churn out yardage and make his presence felt in the third quarter. He finished with 141 rushing yards on 29 carries, a team-high 86 receiving yards and three combined scores, putting together

perhaps the most impressive individual performance of the postseason.

With the Sun Devils failing to contain the Longhorns’ pass rush, ASU quarterback Leavitt had to constantly scramble and throw on the run and finished 23 of 43 for 209 yards, averaging 4.9 yards per attempt.

Ewers hit on 19 of his 29 attempts for the Longhorns. Quintrevion Wisner ran for 45 yards on 18 carries with 40 receiving yards, and Golden had a game-high 149 yards and a touchdown.

The loss ends a dream season for the Sun Devils, who won just three games last season but stormed to the Big 12 crown and earned a bye into the quarterfinals by beating Iowa State in the conference championship game.

## 2025 athletes

Continued from Page 1

success and the fact that she already counts Gatorade and Nike among her commercial partners. But with UConn a strong contender to make another Final Four run, and Bueckers the heavy favorite to go No. 1 overall in the WNBA draft, 2025 could see her springboard into another level of stardom.

### San Jose Sharks center Macklin Celebrini

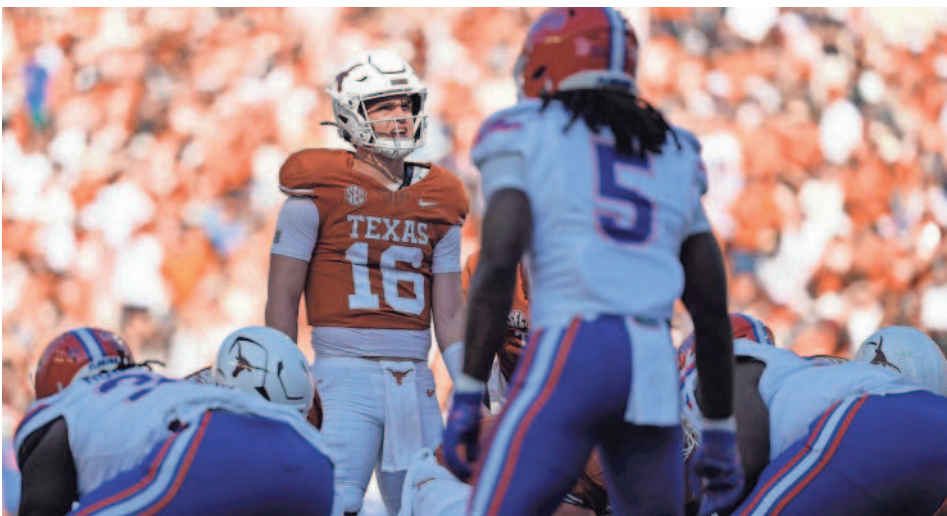
Celebrini was just a few weeks past his 18th birthday when the San Jose Sharks selected him No. 1 overall in last summer’s NHL draft. Though he missed most of October with an injury, he has emerged as one of the team’s key playmakers, racking up 22 points in his first 22 games. More production, and a potential rookie of the year award, could follow in 2025.

### Rutgers guard Dylan Harper

Duke phenom Cooper Flagg got a lot of attention entering this college men’s basketball season, and rightfully so. But keep an eye on Harper, another freshman and likely NBA draft lottery pick, as the calendar turns to 2025. The 6-foot-6 guard was among the leading scorers in college men’s basketball as of Dec. 20 and, in partnership with fellow freshman Ace Bailey, could help Rutgers make some noise in the NCAA Tournament this spring.

### Figure skater Ilia Malinin

Malinin, 20, is already one of the biggest stars in his sport – the reigning world champion and only man in history to land the quadruple axel in international competition. But next year, as the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan ap-



**Texas quarterback Arch Manning (16) looks up at the clock at the end of the second half against Florida.** SCOTT WACHTER/IMAGN IMAGES

proach and the excitement around Team USA starts to build, he will very likely start to become a household name.

### Texas quarterback Arch Manning

After spending the better part of two seasons on the bench, Manning seems likely to take over as Texas’ starter in 2025. And, if his performances in spot duty this season were any indication, he could quickly establish himself as one of the elite quarterbacks in college football – and a potential Heisman Trophy candidate, to boot.

### Soon-to-be MLB pitcher Roki Sasaki

Every few years, a Japanese baseball star makes a ballyhooed move to MLB – and Sasaki is next in line. Over four seasons in Nippon Professional Baseball, he recorded a 2.02 ERA with nearly six strikeouts per walk, showing off a debilitating slider and a fastball that touches 100 mph. It remains unclear where Sasaki would land in MLB, though the New

York Mets and Chicago Cubs have reportedly been among the teams interested.

### Tennis player Ben Shelton

The former Florida Gator made a stunning run to the semifinals of the 2023 U.S. Open and climbed as high as No. 13 in the ATP world rankings earlier in 2024. But 2025 could be the year Shelton, who turned 22 in October, finally cracks the top 10 and begins to more regularly make deeper runs in major tournaments.

### Soon-to-be NFL quarterback Cam Ward

This is in part a reflection of Ward’s sparkling performance in 2024 – when he finished fourth in the Heisman Trophy voting – and in part a guess as to where he might land in the first round of the 2025 NFL draft. Some prognosticators have linked the Miami quarterback to the New York Giants, where he would likely start from Day 1 and be equipped with a solid group of receivers and

backs, led by wideout Malik Nabers.

### San Antonio Spurs center Victor Wembanyama

How could the No. 1 overall pick in the 2023 NBA draft and reigning rookie of the year possibly be on this list? Because, believe it or not, it still doesn’t feel like Wembanyama has “broken out” just yet. In the early part of the 2024-25 season, he’s already shown improvement in key areas, including scoring and 3-point shooting. And by this time next year, he will almost certainly have made his first All-Star team.

### Ajax and U.S. midfielder Lily Yohannes

Yohannes was just 16 years old when she received her first call-up to the U.S. women’s national team in March. And in November, at 17, she formally committed to representing the U.S. (over the Netherlands, where she plays for Ajax) on the international stage. Amid a spate of big-name retirements in recent years, Yohannes figures to be part of the young core that will lead the Americans through qualifying and into the 2027 World Cup.

### Honorable mentions

Real Madrid striker **Endrick**; Duke forward **Cooper Flagg**; UConn guard **Azzi Fudd**; future NFL player **Travis Hunter**; skier **Lauren Macuga**; Minnesota Vikings quarterback **J.J. McCarthy**; Philadelphia Flyers winger **Matvei Michkov**; Manchester United and U.S. women’s soccer goalkeeper **Phallon Tullis-Joyce**; Oklahoma City Thunder forward **Jalen Williams**; Washington Nationals outfielder **James Wood**.

*Contributing: USA TODAY Sports writers Nancy Armour, Mike Brehm, Chris Bumaca, Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz, Lorenzo Reyes, Jesse Yomtov and Jeff Zillgitt.*



NBA POWER RANKINGS

# Celtics hit speed bump as Thunder rolling

Jeff Zillgitt and Lorenzo Reyes  
USA TODAY

The start of the New Year presents a chance for everyone to start anew, set goals and resolutions and look to improve their standing in 2025.

The very same goes for the NBA and its 30 teams, now two months into its season.

As the calendar turns, it’s happening at an inflection point for several franchises. Take, for instance, the defending champion Boston Celtics, who cruised through the first month-and-a-half of the season, only to lose four of their past seven games. Is it a sign for concern, or merely just a speed bump in a very long season?

Then there’s the Oklahoma City Thunder, who are on an NBA-best 12-game winning streak.

Here are the USA TODAY Sports NBA power rankings at the turn of the calendar, with resolutions each team should carry into 2025. *(Note: Records through Tuesday; stats through Monday.)*

**1. Oklahoma City Thunder (27-5):** The hottest team in the league with 11 consecutive victories, the Thunder resolve to make the most of Chet Holmgren when he returns from a pelvic injury.

**2. Cleveland Cavaliers (29-4):** Even the best team in the league has room to get better: The Cavs should resolve to improve their rebounding, where they are tied for 18th (43.7 per game).

**3. New York Knicks (23-10):** Winners of 13 of 15, New York should retain its offensive balance and versatility, though defensive efficiency (112; 13th) and offensive rebounding (9.9 per game; tied for 21st) are areas of concern.

**4. Boston Celtics (24-9):** The Celtics, losers of four of their last seven, should find other ways to score when their 3-pointers aren’t dropping.

**5. Memphis Grizzlies (23-11):** In spite of player availability issues, the Grizzlies have been steady and productive thanks to a deep bench. They



**Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander reacts after a play against the Wizards at Paycom Center.**  
ALONZO ADAMS/IMAGN IMAGES

should turn that depth into a trade ahead of the deadline to add a star.

**6. Houston Rockets (21-11):** They’re young and crazy athletic and thrive on defense, but Houston is wildly inefficient on offense, ranking 28th in true shooting percentage (54.2%). They must practice patience and discretion in their shot selection.

**7. Dallas Mavericks (20-13):** Facing at least a month without Luka Dončić (left calf strain), the Mavericks should develop ways to stay in contention in the loaded Western Conference – players like Klay Thompson and Quentin Grimes will need to step up.

**8. Los Angeles Lakers (18-14):** Make use of the 3-point shooting and defense from Dorian Finney-Smith and Shake Milton, whom the Lakers just acquired in a trade with Brooklyn.

**9. Los Angeles Clippers (19-14):** Keep Kawhi Leonard healthy once he returns.

**10. Denver Nuggets (18-13):** Get Nikola Jokić more help ahead of the Feb. 6 trade deadline.

**11. Minnesota Timberwolves (17-15):** More scoring from the team that ranks 23rd in points per game and 21st in points per 100 possessions.

**12. Atlanta Hawks (18-15):** Atlanta is among the best ball-sharing teams in the NBA and plays very quickly. The Hawks get better if they give it away

less, improving on their 16.5 turnovers per game, tied for 25th.

**13. Miami Heat (16-14):** They struggle defensively when Bam Adebayo is off the floor and struggle offensively when Tyler Herro is off the floor. The Heat must get their role players to step up so those drop-offs aren’t as pronounced.

**14. Orlando Magic (20-14):** The Magic have thrived without their two stars, Paolo Banchero and Franz Wagner, for much of the season. They should maintain their philosophy and defense when both return. And they should protect obliques at all costs.

**15. Milwaukee Bucks (17-14):** Continued stellar play from Giannis Antetokounmpo and Damian Lillard who are the highest scoring pair of teammates in the league at 58.6 points per game.

**16. Indiana Pacers (16-18):** Focus on the defensive end, where the Pacers have made incremental progress in the past 10 games.

**17. San Antonio Spurs (17-16):** Victor Wembanyama is a fringe MVP candidate, but San Antonio must get him some more help – either in further development of its own players or elsewhere – to find consistency.

**18. Golden State Warriors (16-16):** Shoot better from the field, especially inside the 3-point line – where the Warriors are tied for 26th in 2-point field goal percentage.

**19. Phoenix Suns (15-17):** Extended time with a healthy Kevin Durant and Devin Booker. The Suns are 1-10 without Durant and 1-5 without Booker.

**20. Philadelphia 76ers (13-17):** Their Big 3 of Joel Embiid, Tyrese Maxey and Paul George have played together just eight of Philadelphia’s 30 games – or just 26.7%. The Sixers should resolve to have them available far more often.

**21. Chicago Bulls (15-18):** The Bulls should resolve to pick a lane – go all in for the playoffs or focus on keeping their 2025 first-round pick which is protected 1-10; if the Bulls finish with the 20th-best record or better, the pick goes to San Antonio. Today, the Bulls would

give the Spurs the No. 11 pick.

**22. Detroit Pistons (14-18):** Just a tad better shooting for Cade Cunningham who is turning into an All-Star at 24 points, 9.7 assists and 6.7 rebounds per game and 44.7% shooting from the field.

**23. Sacramento Kings (14-19):** Find a head coach who lasts more than three seasons – something that hasn’t happened since Rick Adelman’s eight seasons from 1998 to 2006.

**24. Brooklyn Nets (12-20):** The Nets are rebuilding, with 15 first-round picks (and 31 overall) over the next seven years. They should continue positioning themselves aggressively to add stars.

**25. Portland Trail Blazers (11-21):** Make use of the trade deadline.

**26. Utah Jazz (7-24):** Find individual and team defense that helps them climb out of the basement in points allowed per 100 possessions – a league-worst 119.8.

**27. Washington Wizards (5-25):** They’re last in offensive rating (104.7), net rating (-13.2), player impact estimate (43.3). They should light candles, burn sage and hope and pray they win the NBA draft lottery and, thus, the Cooper Flagg sweepstakes.

**28. Charlotte Hornets (7-25):** The Hornets have lost of 16 of their past 17, rank 28th in offensive rating (107.2). They should embrace offensive efficiency and improved shot selection at every turn.

**29. Toronto Raptors (7-26):** The Raptors have lost an NBA-worst 11 consecutive games. They’ve allowed an average of 143.3 points per game over their last three before Tuesday’s lull; they’ve turned the ball over a league-worst 20.3 times over the last three. They should just focus on fundamentals.

**30. New Orleans Pelicans (5-28):** They have the worst record in basketball, cannot get their players to stay healthy and appear headed toward a sell-off at the deadline. Hopefully, they can construct a unified strategy, have faith and remember that pain is temporary.

# Bregman still seeks MLB home for 2025



**Gabe Lacques**  
Columnist  
USA TODAY

In Houston, they’re already talking about Alex Bregman in the past tense. But what’s next for the two-time All-Star and World Series champion?

The Astros’ American League dynasty was significantly shaped by Bregman’s contributions since he became a full-time player in 2017 and got the biggest hit in their World Series run that year. He went on to sign a five-year, \$100 million contract extension that expired after this season.

Now he’s looking for his full market value.

That’s why the Astros’ six-year, \$156 million offer was deemed insufficient by Bregman and agent Scott Boras. Perhaps that’s pretty close to what Bregman will receive, but Astros general manager Dana Brown told reporters that talks “stalled” recently, which prompted Houston to sign first baseman Christian Walker to a three-year, \$60 million deal last week.

In concert with their acquisition of infielder Isaac Paredes from the Chicago Cubs, that pretty much sealed Bregman’s fate with the Astros. And now he’s the top remaining free agent on the market – No. 4 overall – and things

could move quickly.

A look at the path ahead for Bregman and his future suitors:

## A Tigers tale?

Just as the Astros moved to all but ensure Bregman’s departure, the Detroit Tigers have opened up what looks like a perfect vacancy.

After signing infielder Gleyber Torres to a one-year, \$15 million contract, GM Scott Harris told reporters that second-year infielder Colt Keith would be moving to first base. That leaves a Bregman-sized hole at the hot corner – and a desire in Detroit to maximize the two seasons before its own premier free agent – Cy Young Award winner Tarik Skubal – becomes a free agent.

While Detroit’s last foray into nine-figure free agency – the \$140 million, six-year deal given infielder Javy Báez – has not worked out, 2025 marks the start of that pact’s final three years. A six-year deal that allows the Tigers to best Houston’s \$156 million deal would not be financially onerous by any stretch; adding a seventh year would address future luxury tax concerns.

On the field, Bregman would slot in wonderfully among lefty sluggers Parker Meadows, Riley Greene and postseason hero Kerry Carpenter, while enabling valued veteran Matt Vierling to fulfill a super utility role. And of course, Bregman would reunite with former Astros manager A.J. Hinch, whose star is

again rising after guiding Detroit to the AL division series round last season.

## Polar Bear predicament?

The New York Mets have reached the point where they can’t be ruled out of any free agent pursuit. And while they kick-started the winter with the tremor-producing \$765 million deal for Juan Soto, their second-largest expenditure was “merely” the \$75 million committed to retain lefty starter Sean Manaea.

Now, they’re just kinda hanging around.

Given the manner in which the Soto signing raised the stakes, the infield can hardly be defined as opening day-ready. And like Bregman with the Astros, the Mets could be engaging in their own staring contest with a franchise icon, slugging first baseman Pete Alonso.

It’s hard to imagine the 2025 Mets surrounding their best player, shortstop Francisco Lindor, with Brett Baty, Jeff McNeil and Mark Vientos on the dirt. Certainly, there’s a path to add both Alonso and Bregman: Financially, because owner Steve Cohen’s pockets are bottomless, and in the lineup, with Vientos, Bregman and Alonso bouncing among third, second, first and designated hitter.

Bregman would give the Mets a daunting look: In the six seasons he’s played at least 100 games, Bregman has registered between 4 and 8.9 WAR; Lindor produced 7.9 WAR last year while

Vientos accumulated 3.1 in just 111 games. Meanwhile, Alonso has three seasons of at least 40 homers and five seasons with at least 30.

Still, signing both would seem unlikely. The question is, which one leaps first?

## The field

The “game script” of this offseason has largely gone to plan, most notably with the New York Yankees pivoting to Max Fried (signed to a \$218 million deal) and Cody Bellinger (acquired from the Chicago Cubs) after losing Soto to the Mets, who predictably emptied the vault for him.

Yet the text veered off topic when the Arizona Diamondbacks startlingly signed Corbin Burnes to a \$210 million deal. Will Bregman’s free agency take a similar turn?

There’s already plenty of smoke connecting him to multiple teams. Right now, the Tigers are on the front burner, but the Boston Red Sox, spurned by Soto, Fried and others, remain in the mix. Both Boston and the Toronto Blue Jays fall into the category of high-revenue teams with itchy trigger fingers after failing in bids for marquee additions.

Is that it?

Probably, although the Burnes saga taught us to never rule out the unforeseen. Either way, Bregman should know very soon in 2025 where his new home will be.

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FOR THE RECORD

USA TODAY Sports College Women's Basketball Coaches Poll

Rank, team (1sts)	W-L	Pts	LW
1 UCLA (31)	13-0	775	1
2 South Carolina	12-1	741	2
3 Notre Dame	11-2	678	4
4 LSU	15-0	677	3
5 Southern Cal	12-1	659	5
6 Texas	13-1	621	6
7 Maryland	12-0	572	8
8 UConn	11-2	559	7
9 Ohio State	13-0	526	9
10 Oklahoma	12-1	498	10
11 Kansas State	13-1	461	11
12 TCU	13-1	431	12
13 Tennessee	12-0	384	13
14 Georgia Tech	14-0	355	16
15 Duke	10-3	344	14
16 Kentucky	11-1	319	15
17 North Carolina	13-2	284	17
18 West Virginia	10-2	229	18
19 North Carolina State	10-3	181	20
20 Alabama	13-1	178	21
21 Michigan State	11-2	161	19
22 Iowa	11-2	118	22
23 California	7 9	95	24
24 Baylor	11-2	87	23
25 Ole Miss	9-3	27	26

Dropped out: No. 25 Michigan 10-3.  
Others receiving votes: Mississippi State 13-1  
25; Vanderbilt 13-1 23; Utah 10-2 23; Michigan  
10-3 15; Illinois 11-2 23; Florida State 11-2 11;  
George Mason 11-1 4; Nebraska 10-3 1.

The USA TODAY Sports board of coaches is made up of 31 head coaches at Division I institutions. All are members of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association.

All times Eastern

NFL

American Conference East

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	13	3	0 .813	509	345
Miami	8	8	0.500	325	332
N.Y. Jets	4	12	0.250	306	384
New England	3	13	0.188	266	401

North

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Baltimore	11	5	0.688	483	351
Pittsburgh	10	6	0.625	363	328
Cincinnati	8	8	0.500	453	417
Cleveland	3	13	0.188	248	400

South

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	9	7	0.563	349	358
Indianapolis	7	9	0.438	351	404
Jacksonville	4	12	0.250	297	409
Tennessee	3	13	0.188	297	437

West

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	15	1	0.938	385	288
L.A. Chargers	10	6	0.625	368	281
Denver	9	7	0.563	387	311
Las Vegas	4	12	0.250	289	400

National Conference East

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	13	3	0.813	443	290
Washington	11	5	0.688	462	372
Dallas	7	9	0.438	331	445
N.Y. Giants	3	13	0.188	260	395

North

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	14	2	0.875	533	333
Minnesota	10	2	0.875	423	301
Green Bay	11	5	0.688	438	314
Chicago	4	12	0.250	286	348

South

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	9	7	0.563	475	366
Atlanta	8	9	0.500	351	379
New Orleans	5	11	0.313	319	371
Carolina	4	12	0.250	297	496

West

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Rams	10	6	0.625	342	356
Seattle	7	9	0.563	345	343
Arizona	7	9	0.438	353	355
San Francisco	6	10	0.375	365	389

Saturday's Games

Cleveland at Baltimore, 4:30 p.m.  
Cincinnati at Pittsburgh, 8 p.m.

Sunday's Games

Carolina at Atlanta, 1 p.m.  
Washington at Dallas, 1 p.m.  
Chicago at Green Bay, 1 p.m.  
Jacksonville at Indianapolis, 1 p.m.  
Buffalo at New England, 1 p.m.  
N.Y. Giants at Philadelphia, 1 p.m.  
New Orleans at Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.

Houston at Tennessee, 1 p.m.  
San Francisco at Arizona, 4:25 p.m.  
Kansas City at Denver, 4:25 p.m.  
Seattle at L.A. Rams, 4:25 p.m.  
L.A. Chargers at Las Vegas, 4:25 p.m.  
Miami at N.Y. Jets, 4:25 p.m.  
Minnesota at Detroit, 8:20 p.m.

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

Philadelphia	13	17	.433	9½
Brooklyn	12	20	.375	11½
Toronto	7	26	.212	17

Southeast Division

Atlanta	18	15	.545	1½
Miami	16	14	.533	2
Charlotte	7	25	.219	12
Washington	5	25	.167	13

Central Division

Milwaukee	17	14	.548	11
Indiana	16	18	.471	13½
Chicago	15	18	.455	14
Detroit	14	18	.438	14½

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

Dallas	20	13	.606	2½
San Antonio	17	16	.515	5½
New Orleans	5	28	.152	17½

Northwest Division

Denver	18	13	.581	8½
Minnesota	17	15	.531	10
Portland	11	21	.344	16
Utah	7	24	.226	19½

Pacific Division

L.A. Lakers	18	14	.563	½
Golden State	16	16	.500	2½
Phoenix	15	17	.469	3½
Sacramento	14	19	.424	5

Tuesday's Scores

Boston 125, Toronto 71  
Milwaukee 120, Indiana 112  
San Antonio 122, L.A. Clippers 86  
Oklahoma City 113, Minnesota 105  
Cleveland 122, L.A. Lakers 110  
Memphis 117, Phoenix 112

Wednesday's Games

Chicago at Washington  
Orlando at Detroit  
Brooklyn at Toronto  
New Orleans at Miami  
Utah at N.Y. Knicks  
Dallas at Houston  
Atlanta at Denver  
Philadelphia at Sacramento

Thursday's Games

Boston 125, Toronto 71  
Indiana at Miami, 7:30 p.m.  
Boston at Minnesota, 7:30 p.m.  
Brooklyn at Milwaukee, 8 p.m.  
Philadelphia at Golden State, 10 p.m.  
Portland at L.A. Lakers, 10:30 p.m.

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

Ottawa	19	15	2	40	110	103
Montreal	17	17	3	37	113	127
Detroit	15	18	4	34	98	120
Buffalo	14	20	4	32	116	128

Metropolitan Division

New Jersey	24	13	3	51	132	101
Carolina	22	13	2	46	128	106
Pittsburgh	17	17	5	39	120	145
Columbus	16	16	6	38	127	136
Philadelphia	17	17	4	38	119	136
N.Y. Islanders	14	17	7	35	102	122
N.Y. Rangers	16	19	1	33	101	113

Western Conference

Central Division

W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Winnipeg	27	11	1	55	142	96
Minnesota	23	11	4	50	113	104
Colorado	23	15	0	46	130	123

Dallas	22	13	1	45	116	91
St. Louis	18	17	5	47	113	95
Utah	16	15	6	38	106	112
Nashville	11	20	7	29	91	122
Chicago	12	24	2	26	96	129

Pacific Division

L.A. Kings	21	10	5	47	113	95
Edmonton	22	12	3	47	121	105
Calgary	18	12	7	43	101	111
Vancouver	17	11	8	42	112	115
Seattle	17	19	2	36	111	119
Anaheim	15	17	4	34	91	111
San Jose	11	23	6	28	105	146

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Tuesday's Scores

Washington 3, Boston 1  
Toronto 3, N.Y. Islanders 1  
Montreal 3, Vegas 2  
St. Louis 6, Chicago 2  
Anaheim 3, New Jersey 2  
Colorado 5, Winnipeg 2

Wednesday's Games

Washington 3, Boston 1  
Toronto 3, N.Y. Islanders 1  
Montreal 3, Vegas 2  
St. Louis 6, Chicago 2  
Anaheim 3, New Jersey 2  
Colorado 5, Winnipeg 2

Thursday's Games

Minnesota at Washington, 7 p.m.  
Boston at N.Y. Rangers, 7 p.m.  
Carolina at Florida, 7 p.m.  
Detroit at Columbus, 7 p.m.  
Toronto at N.Y. Islanders, 7:30 p.m.  
Ottawa at Dallas, 8 p.m.  
Anaheim at Winnipeg, 8 p.m.  
Buffalo at Colorado, 9 p.m.  
Utah at Calgary, 9 p.m.  
Philadelphia at Vegas, 10 p.m.  
Vancouver at Seattle, 10:30 p.m.  
Tampa Bay at San Jose, 10:30 p.m.

TRANSACTIONS

Tuesday's Transactions

FOOTBALL

National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS – RB Hassan Hall practice squad addition. G Nick Leverett Activated from the Practice Squad. RB Trey Benson Placed on IR ankle.  
CLEVELAND BROWNS – G Zack Johnson practice squad addition to San Francisco 49ers. LB Brandon Boyer-Randle cut. K Andre Szmyt practice squad deletion. TE Cameron Latu practice squad addition. RB Aidan Robbins practice squad addition. RB John Kelly Jr. signed. WR Cedric Tillman Placed on IR concussion. LB Brandon Boyer-Randle Taken off IR undisclosed.

DALLAS COWBOYS – T Josh Ball Activated from the Practice Squad to New Orleans Saints. RB Ezekiel Elliott cut.  
DETROIT LIONS – CB Morice Norris cut. DT Chris Smith practice squad addition. RB Jermain Jefferson practice squad addition.  
HOUSTON TEXANS – T David Sharpe practice squad addition to New York Jets. WR Justin Janke practice squad addition. T Zach Thomas reserve/non-football-injury illness. T Austin Deculus Activated from the Practice Squad.

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS – CB Tyler Hall practice squad addition to Seattle Seahawks. DE Joe Gaziano practice squad addition.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS – RB John Kelly Jr. signed to Cleveland Browns.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS – LB Yannick Ngakoue cut.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS – T Austin Deculus Activated from the Practice Squad to Houston Texans. T Josh Ball Activated from the Practice Squad. LB Jaylan Ford Placed on IR broken fibula.

NEW YORK JETS – T David Sharpe practice squad addition. K Greg Joseph Activated from the Practice Squad. K Greg Zuerlein Placed on IR left knee.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES – RB Lew Nichols practice squad deletion. DE Taron Jackson practice squad deletion. DE Charles Harris practice squad addition. CB Mekhi Garner practice squad addition. CB Tariq Castro-Fields practice squad addition.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS – G Zack Johnson practice squad addition. C Drake Nugent practice squad addition. DE Alex Barrett practice squad addition. LB Dre Greenlaw Placed on IR calf.

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS – CB Tyler Hall practice squad addition. LB Michael Dowell practice squad addition.

TAMPA BAY BUCCANERS – LB Antonio Grier Jr. practice squad addition. DE Earnest Brown IV practice squad addition.



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NFL

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
BALTIMORE	17.5	42	Cleveland
Cincinnati	1.5	48.5	PITTSBURGH

Sunday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
ATLANTA	8.5	48	Carolina
Washington	4.5	44	DALLAS
GREEN BAY	9	40.5	Chicago
INDIANAPOLIS	5	45.5	Jacksonville
Buffalo	3	38	NEW ENGLND
PHILADELPHIA	3	38.5	NY Giants
TAMPA BAY	13	43.5	New Orleans
ARIZONA	3	44	San Francisco
DENVER	10	39	Kansas City
Seattle	4	39.5	LA RAMS
LA Chargers	5.5	41	LAS VEGAS
Miami	1.5	39.5	NY JETS
DETROIT	2.5	57.5	Minnesota

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
OLE MISS	17.5	51.5	Duke

Friday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
TEXAS ST.	13.5	61	North Texas
Minnesota	8	42.5	VA. TECH

Saturday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG

Buffalo 2.5 51 LIBERTY

Monday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
MONTANA ST.	3.5	56.5	North Dakota St.

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE FIESTA BOWL

# Boise State showed why it is different



**Matt Hayes**  
USA TODAY Sports Network

*“You have been called to this kingdom for such a time as this.” – Esther 4:13-14.*

GLENDALE, Ariz. – He stood in the empty locker room at State Farm Stadium, trying to make sense of it all. The loss, the end of a unique football season. The sudden finality.

But Boise State head coach Spencer Danielson couldn’t stop evangelizing.

It’s so much more than proving you belong after a closer-than-it-looked 34-14 loss to Penn State in the College Football Playoff. This is about proving what you’re doing works – even if it doesn’t fit in a now cash-based sport quickly losing its soul.

“We’re different,” Danielson said. “What we are doing here is not happening in college football.”

Now he’s getting lathered up. Now, after inviting USA TODAY Sports to spend the weekend with his team to see the process of equal parts coaching, development, accountability, and yes, love, the unraveling of college football is coming into focus.

He can’t hold back anymore. “You’ve got coaches and programs and administrations that now have golden handcuffs. They’re beholden to the money,” Danielson said. “They’ve changed what they believe to win games. They don’t want to, but everyone else is doing it. So what choice do they have?”

He pauses and runs his hands through his neatly brushed hair. Danielson is 36, and he has been a head coach for all of 13 months, but he believes deeply that he has been called to this moment, with this program.

There’s a plan for everyone, he says. When it’s placed so plainly in front of you, there’s no alternative.

“Once you do that, once you change what you believe as a coach and a person,” Danielson continues, “You can never go back. Because you’ll have to change everything.”

## Making sense of where college football is headed

Someone has to say it, he says. Someone has to make sense of where college football is headed.

It would’ve had a much greater impact had Boise State not fallen apart in the fourth quarter after closing to a three-point deficit Tuesday night. A much greater impact after SEC big spenders Alabama and South Carolina – whining for the last month about missing the CFP – were embarrassed in bowl games.

As it is, it’s hard to ignore what has happened in 13 short months since Danielson was first named interim coach and eventually head coach at Boise State. The Broncos have won back-to-back Mountain West Conference championships for the first time in school history and returned to national relevance for the first time in a decade. They earned a top four seed in the College Football Playoff, and the first-round bye that goes with it.

They had a Heisman Trophy runner-up in star tailback Ashton Jeanty, who came within 28 yards of Barry Sanders’ immortal single-season rushing record of 2,628 yards. Jeanty, like Boise State, proved he deserved to be on the big stage, too – rushing for 104 tough yards on 30 carries against the No. 6 rush defense in the nation.

Long after the game, Penn State coach James Franklin found Jeanty as he walked from the Broncos locker room. He reached out and grabbed Jeanty’s hand and held tight.

“I love the way you play, man,” Franklin said. “I love what you’re about, and how you carry yourself. We need more like you in our game.”

## Ashton Jeanty part of different college football model

This is real and tangible, everyone. A direct reflection of investing emotionally and physically over financially, and laying out a clear path to success on and off the field.

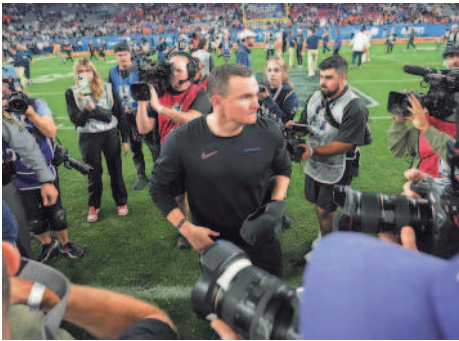
Or the exact opposite of the current model.

Make no mistake, this isn’t about refusing to pay players. Boise State found a way to pay Jeanty what it could through its collective – but only after Jeanty turned down a \$1 million dollar-plus deal from multiple Power Four conference schools.

He told USA TODAY Sports in October that he left “a lot” of money on the table



**Boise State running back Ashton Jeanty (2) stands with teammates after the loss to Penn State on Tuesday night in the Fiesta Bowl at State Farm Stadium.** JOE CAMPOREALE/IMAGN IMAGES



**Boise State coach Spencer Danielson walks off the field after the loss Tuesday in the Fiesta Bowl. His Broncos were 12-2 this season and the Mountain West Conference champions.** JOE RONDONE/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

because he was invested in Boise State, “and they were invested in developing me, the player and the person.”

There’s no disconnect here. Danielson, like about every other coach, believes players deserve their fair share. It’s just that money and free player movement has dismantled the long-standing ideal of developing players and young men.

The idea of earning has been replaced by giving. And while some programs are flourishing, more and more are struggling because they’ve gotten away from what made them unique in the first place.

Now we have players suing coaches and collectives for broken deals, and collectives refusing to pay players who don’t perform or refuse to play.

Nick Saban, the greatest coach in the sport’s history, left Alabama after last season because he was sick of it. If he’s over it, what does it say about the rest of the sport?

More to the point, what does it say about Boise State and the program Danielson has built – that the Broncos were in a one-possession game with mighty Penn State late in the third quarter of a playoff game, and nearly pulled the unthinkable again?

Or that after Penn State pulled away and won, Boise State stayed on the field together for 20 minutes, eventually running a lap around the stadium – every player – to thank the Broncos fans. That just doesn’t happen anywhere else.

Not long after that and during the postgame news conference, the reality of what was built against the strong headwinds of free-flowing NIL (name, image and likeness) cash came into clear focus. There was star defensive lineman Ahmed Hassanein, who left a difficult home life in Cairo, Egypt, and eventually found his way to Boise State because his brother knew Danielson from their time together at Azusa Pacific College.

At halftime, with Boise State trailing 17-7, he stood in the middle of the locker room screaming, “This is ain’t no Cinderella story. We deserve to be here. This will not be my last game here.”

Now the end of his time at Boise State had set in, and it was crushing.

“Coach D,” Hassanein said, his voice halting through tears, “You saved my life. I want everyone to know that. You saved my life. I love you.”

## Boise State culture is king

This journey began in November 2023, when Boise State athletic director Jeremiah Dickey fired coach Andy Avalos and made Danielson the interim coach.

Danielson walked into the team meeting room at Boise State, a hundred

desperate faces hanging on his every word. The Broncos had five losses and a slim chance to reach the Mountain West championship game, and who in the world would blame both coaches and players for focusing on individual futures?

“He said give me two weeks. That’s it, two weeks,” Jeanty said. “Grown men finish what they’ve started, and we don’t know where this thing will end.”

They’ve won 15 of 18 games since, including a three-point loss to Oregon in September, the loss to Penn State, and a loss to UCLA in a meaningless bowl game where Boise State played a quarterback who hadn’t thrown a college pass.

We’re nearly 13 months into it, and it hasn’t ended – it’s growing despite the inherent financial disadvantages for Group of Five schools. Despite a program still in chase mode.

Because after all of those other power conference schools fail in the CFP and bowl games, they’re reloading with deep-pocket NIL collectives and the lure of playing in mega television games week after week.

They’re signing talent and changing what they do to make it fit, searching for some form of chemistry within the delicate dance of juggling individual NIL deals and personalities that may or may not be counterproductive.

By the time the season begins again in the fall, pay for play will likely have arrived in college football. The NCAA has agreed to a salary pool of an estimated \$20 million per team – for those programs that can afford it.

For those that can’t, there’s only one fallback position. And you can’t miss.

“I still believe culture is king,” Dickey said. “As we professionalize our sport, I’m watching these other teams and how much money they have and the value of their franchises, they’re not always winning. It leads me back to culture, and our culture is Spencer.”

## The right fit

This is how it works at the Group of Five level, when the travel budget is tight and larger conference comforts are a pipe dream for a critical conference game.

It’s mid-November in Laramie, Wyoming, and it’s cold and wet and there’s nothing fancy about it. Just a crummy Holiday Inn with no meeting space, and a team rolling in late because of travel delays.

Needless to say, Boise State wasn’t breaking routine.

The important Friday walk-through, one last chance to get on the same page and zero in on the game plan, happened in the Holiday Inn parking lot. Ice on the ground, and – get this – no lights.

“Doesn’t matter. Just put the ball down, man,” said Boise State guard Ben Dooley. “Put the ball down and let us play.”

There’s nothing pampered and sheltered about this program, or its players. Nothing that screams me over we.

You’re not going to find these guys on the Hot 100 recruiting board, or the best players available in the transfer portal. They just fit the mold of what Danielson is looking for, and are then developed into elite college players. Some into NFL talent.

It’s players like Hassanein, who started playing football as a sophomore in high school and just needed an opportunity. Danielson, the Boise State defensive coordinator before being named

head coach, signed him and developed him – and Hassanein had 23 sacks in the last two seasons and will more than likely be a mid-round selection in the NFL draft.

It’s nose guard Herbert Gums, who had LSU, Arkansas and Missouri trying to sign him as a running back after a big junior season in high school, only to pull away after he gained weight to play defensive line. There was no better interior defensive lineman in the MWC this season, and he’ll be on someone’s NFL camp roster next summer.

It’s quarterback Maddux Madsen, whose father named him after major league pitcher Greg Maddux – and it couldn’t be more fitting. Madsen is listed as 5-foot-10, 203 pounds, and he’s an inch shy and a suitcase short of those numbers.

He doesn’t have the strongest arm or the most dynamic ability (hello, Greg Maddux), and if he shaved an admittedly cheesy mustache, he’d look like the 15-year-old down the street who mows your lawn. But he’s a baby-faced assassin on the field: a tough and fearless gamer, and the perfect complement to Jeanty.

He threw three interceptions against Penn State, matching his season total. He was inconsolable in the locker room afterward, a towel draped over his head and face.

“We’re not here without you,” Jeanty told him. “We win and lose together.”

## A light on the hill

An hour before kickoff, Danielson walked through the locker room and said he was going to pray on the field. Anyone who was interested was welcome.

Some joined, some stayed in the locker room.

It’s a controversial option within his program, and he knows it. He’s a believer, and he’d walk away tomorrow if he was told he couldn’t speak about his faith to those who wanted to hear it.

Last summer, Jeanty asked Danielson to officiate his baptism. Not long after that, a group of players showed up at Danielson’s office and asked the same.

So they walked down two flights of stairs to the field access at Albertson’s Stadium, and walked across the street and into the Boise River.

“He and I talk about that a lot,” Dickey said. “For so long, I tended to hide who I was in this industry. I’m not going to do that, and I don’t want him to do that. It’s not force-fed, he’s not loading up the bus and driving players to church. I told Spencer I’ve sold my soul long enough in life that I’m not going to operate in fear around something so important to me.”

They gathered together on the field minutes after the loss to Penn State. The confetti was flying and the Lions were celebrating and everything they worked so hard for was happening for someone else.

“You guys are so much more than this moment,” Danielson said. “Never settle for less. We’ve established a standard. We will be the light on the hill.”

An hour later, the locker room was clearing and the journey was officially over. For now.

The start of the new season with off-season workouts is days away.

“Wipe those tears off your face,” cornerback Jeremiah Earby said aloud. “We’re going back to work.”

*Matt Hayes is the senior national college football writer for USA TODAY Sports Network. Follow him on X at @MattHayesCFB.*





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LIFELINE



ETIENNE LAURENT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

MAKING WAVES  
DUCHESS MEGHAN

Duchess Meghan is ready to reconnect: She has returned to Instagram. Her eponymous new account launched on New Year’s Day with a celebratory walk on the beach. In her first Reel, Prince Harry’s wife runs toward the water, casually clad in a white button-front shirt and rolled-up slacks. She writes “2025” in the sand and turns to the camera to flash a smile. The Duchess of Sussex was an active presence on social media before marrying Harry, but ditched her personal account during their courtship, in keeping with royal protocol.



IT’S YOUR BIRTHDAY  
WHO’S CELEBRATING TODAY

Kate Bosworth is 42. Dax Shepard is 50. Taye Diggs is 54.

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- Aries** (March 21-April 19). Seeking a spiritual connection? Your compassion capacity increases. You expect equal empathy from a lover.
- Taurus** (April 20-May 20). Getting by with a little help from your friends? Reconnect with your true blues.
- Gemini** (May 21-June 21). Seeing the best in everyone? Your encouragement and support improve professional relationships.
- Cancer** (June 22-July 22). Yearning to be romanced? You seek an escape from reality, preferably in an exotic setting.
- Leo** (July 23-Aug. 22). Psychic connections? An emotional bond intensifies. How deep are you prepared to go?
- Virgo** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Prepared to forgive and forget? Venus’ entrance to Pisces provides perspective on a romantic matter.
- Libra** (Sept.23-Oct. 23). Unexpected office perks? A boss notices your business contributions. Workplace rewards are incoming.
- Scorpio** (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Getting swept up in the moment? Romantic inspiration dictates your decisions.
- Sagittarius** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Looking for a love that feels like home? Surround yourself with trusted confidantes.
- Capricorn** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Having a heart-to-heart? Venus’ entrance to Pisces brings out your softer side. Empathic exchanges solidify new friendships.
- Aquarius** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Intangible desires? You want something that you can’t quite define. Sentimental possessions are precious.
- Pisces** (Feb. 19-March 20). Ready for your close-up? Eyes are on you. But do YOU like what you see?

BOOKS



New year’s titles will satisfy your ‘Hunger’

Clare Mulroy USA TODAY

Got a New Year’s resolution you’re excited about? • Maybe you want to eat healthier or travel more in 2025. For booklovers, the start of a new year is less a time to set goals and more an opportunity to build out our never-ending TBR lists. • It’s the perfect time to add new titles to your shelf and USA TODAY has some suggestions. Starting in January, we’ll be bringing you a recap of the buzziest new titles released each month. You can stay up to date by subscribing to our weekly newsletter or checking out our Best-Selling Booklist.

Most anticipated 2025 book releases

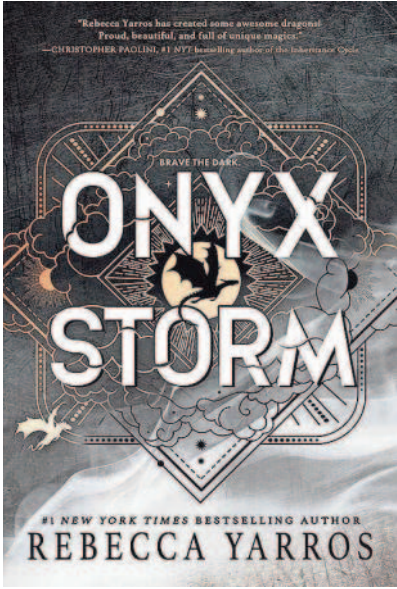
While we look forward to the start of a fresh year, here are 15 new releases we have our eyes on across genres, including fantasy, literary fiction, memoir, nonfiction and sci-fi. Titles are listed in order of anticipated publication date.

“Onyx Storm” by Rebecca Yarros (Jan. 21)

The third book in the Yarros’ “Empyrean” series comes out this month from Entangled Publishing. The follow-up to “Fourth Wing” and “Iron Flame” swaps Basgiath War College lessons for battle. In “Onyx Storm,” Violet Sorrengail must journey outside Aretia and find allies to stand with Navarre. But she also is keeping a secret so big it threatens to destroy everything.

“Deep End” by Ali Hazelwood (Feb. 4)

From the author of “Bride” and “The Love Hypothesis” comes a contemporary college romance about a competitive diver and swimmer. In “Deep End,” platform-diving Stanford student-athlete Scarlett prefers to keep her head down until she gets into medical school and recovers



from a near career-ending injury. For Lukas, a swim captain and world champion, focus and discipline are the names of the game. After a secret is revealed, Lukas and Scarlett come to an arrangement, their relationship heating up on the road to the Olympics.

“Stag Dance” by Torrey Peters (March 11)

“Stag Dance” is a collection of one novel and three stories from the

See BOOKS, Page 2D

STREAMING

Michelle Buteau speaks her ‘Mind’ in new special

Patrick Ryan USA TODAY

NEW YORK – In 2013, Michelle Buteau laid out a five-year plan for herself: have two kids, her own TV show, and a backyard in Brooklyn for composting. Although she now lives in the Bronx, the “Survival of the Thickest” star has since manifested all of those things and much more, including the Netflix comedy special “Michelle Buteau: A Buteau-ful Mind at Radio City Music Hall” (now streaming). “Look at that! I’m doing it,” Buteau says with a grin. “Composting is actually the hardest of all of that. I’m still figuring out what to do with eggshells and I don’t like fruit flies. I didn’t even realize I was manifesting, but it’s nice to be passionate about stuff. You don’t even have to be positive all the time, but just like something or someone – maybe yourself.”



Michelle Buteau says her comedy is about “having fun and loving on each other in a respectful way.” PROVIDED BY NATHANIAL GARY

Buteau calls out Dave Chappelle in new Netflix special

With this hourlong set, Buteau, 47, makes history as the first woman to film a comedy special at Radio City. The milestone is filled with “a rainbow of emotions” for the vivacious and unapologetic comedian, who was determined to make others feel “seen” by headlining the famed theater. “I never asked my team, ‘Can I do this?’” Buteau says. “I was like, ‘How can you help me do this?’ I don’t want to hear ‘can’t.’ It’s insane. How do you exist as a Black, brown, queer, or fat person? You just do. Stop listening to people who want to keep you down.” “Buteau-ful Mind” is the pièce de resistance after the “slow simmer” of Buteau’s career: For nearly two decades, she hustled on the New York standup circuit, playing to rooms of just a few dozen people at venues such as Union Hall, Littlefield and The Slipper Room. “You don’t get to Radio City without hours and hours of Slipper Room experience,” she says. “The love you have for those 30 people is the same love that translates to those 6,000. But you also have to advocate for yourself and other people. When I was doing bar shows, I could barely get a drink ticket. Now, I’m like, ‘This is what I need, and this is how I want people to feel.’” Like 2020’s “Welcome to Buteautopia,” her latest special mines laughs from marriage, motherhood and marijuana. But Buteau also imbues her jokes with an ethos of inclusivity, as she declares her wish for everyone to feel “safe, secure” and “entertained” through her comedy. At one point, she smartly eviscerates comedian Dave Chappelle, who has doubled down on homophobic and transphobic rhetoric in recent years. “I’m not saying you can’t say things – I’m just saying, ‘Can you make it funny?’ Because it doesn’t feel funny,” Buteau says. “You’re hurting people and you’re making it dangerous. And it’s not just Chappelle – it’s part of the culture that I don’t understand. When people say, ‘We can’t do what we used to do.’ Yeah! Slavery used to be legal, you guys.” “Sometimes we’ve got to move forward, and I’m sorry if it’s different, but wrap your little mind around it.”

See BUTEAU , Page 2D



STREAMING

# ‘Squid Game’ players dissect Season 2 finale

Kelly Lawler  
USA TODAY

*Spoiler alert! The following contains details from the Season 2 finale of ‘Squid Game.’*  
How is Gi-hun going to get out of this one?

The final moments of the second season of Netflix’s smash hit “Squid Game” are some of the most brutal and upsetting of the entire season, and they end with quite a bang. After leading some of his fellow players in an uprising against the games, Seong Gi-hun (Lee Jung-jae) sees his rebellion instantly squashed. The man he thought was an ally in the game was in fact the villainous Front Man (Lee Byung-hun), who dons his mask just in time to kill Gi-hun’s best friend Jung-bae (Lee Seo-hwan) in front of him. And then the credits roll.

Now more people are dead, the Front Man has won, the games can go on unabated and Gi-hun’s life is in danger. Where do we go from here? And why end on such a big cliffhanger?

“Gi-hun has a huge sense of loss, defeat and guilt weighing on him,” says Hwang Dong-hyuk, the series director and creator. “When he is just filled with complete, utter loss and guilt after all of his attempts (to stop the games) fail, I thought that was the adequate ending to give closure to the second season.”

It’s an abrupt and shocking finale that leaves much to be answered in the series’ third season, due in 2025. Hwang and actor Lee Jung-jae spoke to USA TODAY through translators to break down the shocking and brutally violent



Lee Byung-hun as the Front Man in “Squid Game.” PROVIDED BY NO JU-HAN/NETFLIX

final episode, and what fans can expect from Season 3.

### The Front Man was playing Gi-hun for the entire season

“It is really a showdown between Front Man and Gi-hun that’s at the heart of the plot,” Hwang said of the second season’s theme. The Front Man “wants to make sure he brings down all of Gi-hun’s purpose,” and completely obliterate the man and crush his spirit.

Lee didn’t mince words about Gi-hun’s position at the end of the season: “The Front Man totally played Gi-hun.”

“The Front Man decided that he will allow the players to cast a vote after each round is because he believes ... they’re still not going to want to leave

because of their greed,” Hwang said. “At the end of the day, the story reflects the capitalist society and how it drives people to this competition. There is no opportunity for losers. The winner takes all and the losers are driven to lose their humanity.”

### Where did rebellion come from?

Gi-hun did everything he could to stop the games, Hwang and Lee say, and when he couldn’t think of anything else, he took up arms and was willing to kill for it. He and his allies plot to overpower the pink-jumpsuited “soldiers” running the games and mount an armed insurrection aimed at overthrowing the facility’s overlords.

“He chooses violence,” Hwang said.

“He chooses to physically fight the system and overthrow the system, which fails again. The price that he has to pay for that is losing his best friend Jung-bae.”

Lee says the character he plays in Season 2 is a “totally different man” than the flaky, silly gambler Gi-hun started out as in Season 1. “He is full of vengeance, and he doesn’t want anymore.”

He sees echoes of political unrest in the “Squid” storylines (in South Korea, political protests have taken place amid a constitutional crisis).

“I think it really mirrors our society,” Lee said. “I think the ‘Squid Game’ arena is actually a miniature of our society. When you find that your political system is unfair, or if there’s a dictatorship or there’s just an unfair society, then there might be a coup. People will take it to the streets, or there will be people who would want to append a system in some way. We see this all the time in the news, and I think it was a great metaphor that we see in the last episode of ‘Squid Game.’ ”

### What about the VIPs?

Season 1 of “Squid Game” included “VIPs,” wealthy spectators who enjoyed watching the poor peasants fight and die as they bet millions on the outcome. They don’t show up at all in Season 2, but Hwang promises they are not gone.

“You will get to see the VIPs in the third season,” he says. “They’re coming. They’re on the way. Their chopper is flying over the island now.”

## Books

Continued from Page 1D

bestselling author of “Detransition, Baby.” In the titular novel, restless lumberjacks plan a dance under the condition that some of them will attend as women. In “an astonishing vision of gender and transition,” the publisher writes, the axmen are caught up in a strange rivalry, jealousy and obsession. The other short stories feature a gender apocalypse, a secret romance between Quaker boarding school roommates and a party weekend on the Las Vegas Strip that turns dark.

### “Sunrise on the Reaping” by Suzanne Collins (March 18)

“Sunrise on the Reaping” is the fifth “Hunger Games” installment, revisiting Panem 24 years before the first book’s events. The prequel begins on the reaping of the 50th Hunger Games, which Katniss’ mentor Haymitch won. In a statement, Collins said the novel will offer a “deeper dive into the use of propaganda and the power of those who control the narrative.” Lionsgate will adapt the movie into a feature film in 2026.

### “Everything Is Tuberculosis” by John Green (March 18)

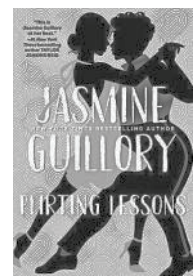
“Everything Is Tuberculosis” is Green’s second nonfiction work, following the success of his young adult fiction titles “The Fault in Our Stars” and the recently adapted “Turtles All the Way Down.” Green’s new release will follow his friendship with a young tuberculosis patient and a historical look at how tuberculosis has shaped our world.

### “Say You’ll Remember Me” by Abby Jimenez (April 1)

Known for “Part of Your World” and “Just for the Summer,” Jimenez’s new contemporary romance novel reckons with a relationship that’s both enticing and utterly wrong. When Samantha meets the gorgeous veterinarian Xavier, he seems too good to be true. And he is – they may have had an earth-shattering date, but when he opens his mouth, he says the absolute wrong thing. Can he admit he made a mistake? Can Samantha rationalize the impossibility of the relationship with the memory of their perfect date?

### “Flirting Lessons” by Jasmine Guillory (April 8)

This is the first sapphic romance novel from the author of “The Wedding Date” and “The Proposal.” Guillory’s “Flirting Lessons” is about a



30-something, fresh off the heels of a breakup and looking for something more. Avery wants to date women, but she doesn’t have experience or much confidence. And Taylor, a notorious flirt, has just agreed to a two-month no-sex bet. She needs to keep busy, and Avery needs help – how about a little flirting lesson?

### “Great Big Beautiful Life” by Emily Henry (April 22)

An Emily Henry book without a two-word title? That’s right – Henry breaks from the pattern of her recent novels (“Funny Story,” “Happy Place,” “Book Lovers”) and will tell the story of two writers in a competition this spring. In “Great Big Beautiful Life,” eternal optimist Alice and human thundercloud Hayden will face off to write the biography of a famous heiress.

### “Matriarch” by Tina Knowles (April 22)

Knowles, the businesswoman, designer and mother of Beyoncé and Solange Knowles will tell all in her memoir “Matriarch.” Knowles played a crucial role in her children’s careers, especially in the forming of Destiny’s Child in the ‘90s. “Matriarch” is a testament to Black motherhood, from Knowles’ childhood in Texas to raising some of the world’s biggest artists.

### “The Emperor of Gladness” by Ocean Vuong (May 13)

This year saw Vuong’s return to poetry collections with “Time Is a Mother,” and 2025 is his return to the novel. “The Emperor of Gladness” is

a tribute to a chosen family and unexpected friendship, opening on a 19-year-old ready to take his life, only to be called back to the other side by an elderly widow suffering from dementia.

### “My Friends” by Fredrik Backman (May 20)

From the author of “A Man Called Ove” and “Anxious People” comes a new tale of the transcendent power of friendship and art. In “My Friends,” a woman seeks real-life inspiration for one of the most famous paintings in the world – three tiny figures sitting on a pier. Twenty-five years earlier, three teenagers found refuge in a friendship that kept them afloat and away from their difficult home lives.

### “Atmosphere” by Taylor Jenkins Reid (June 3)

The author of “The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo” returns with an epic love story set during the 1980s space shuttle program. In “Atmosphere,” Joan Goodwin joins a team of NASA’s first female scientists in space. But don’t get your hopes up about “Atmosphere” existing in the same timeline as “Daisy Jones,” “Evelyn Hugo,” “Malibu Rising” and “Carrie Soto” – Reid told Amazon Books in 2023 that her new book would be different and “this particular universe is over.”

### “Bury Our Bones in the Midnight Soil” by V.E. Schwab (June 10)

Sci-fi and fantasy writer Schwab is best known for “The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue” and returns this summer with “Bury Our Bones in the Midnight Soil.” This genre-defying novel follows three young women – from the 1500s, 1800s and 2019 – buried in the same soil, their stories “tangling like roots,” publisher Macmillan writes.

### “Don’t Let Him In” by Lisa Jewell (June 24)

A new Jewell novel is always good news to mystery lovers. After restaurateur Paddy is murdered, his wife and 20-something daughter receive a package and note from an old friend of Paddy’s. In the same town, an emergency makes florist Martha realize her money-strapped life with an absent husband needs to change. “Don’t Let Him In” sends the three women colliding in twisty, unexpected ways.

### “Katabasis” by R.F. Kuang (Aug. 26)

The author of “The Poppy War” and “Yellowface” returns with a dark academia fantasy described as Dante’s “Inferno” meets Susanna Clarke’s “Piranesi.” Here, two graduate students must put their rivalry aside as they journey to hell to save their professor’s soul.

## Buteau

Continued from Page 1D

### Buteau turned to standup after 9/11: ‘I might as well live’

Born in New Jersey to Caribbean parents, Buteau didn’t grow up with comedy ambitions. Instead, she aspired to be an entertainment journalist and started her career as a news producer for NBC in New York.

“For a while, co-workers were like, ‘You’re so funny! You should do standup,’ ” Buteau recalls. “I’ve always said I was too cute for an edit bay. A Black person with freckles? Are you kidding? Give me a window!”

Although she loved meeting new people out in the field, she grew depressed creating obituary reels and covering hard news. And three days after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001, she performed her first standup set.

“When I was editing really sad stuff, I was like, ‘There’s so much death. I might as well live,’ ” Buteau says. “It sounds so stupid, but comedy saved me in a lot of ways. It helped me find my voice, and learn to speak up for myself and other people.”

For years, Buteau cut her teeth playing “really terrible road gigs.” (“I was like, ‘Am I eating dog food? Do people want me here? Everyone’s got their back turned to me.’”) In the meantime, she was steadily booking small movie roles with Kristen Stewart (“Happiest Season”) and Jennifer Lopez (“Marry Me”), eventually working her way to the top of the call sheet in Netflix’s “Survival of the Thickest,” which she also created and produced. The comedy series, which is based on her 2020 book, returns this year for Season 2.

“Michelle has worked for 23 years to build to this moment,” says Ilana Glazer, who co-starred with Buteau in last summer’s “Babes.” “People are really catching on and it’s no wonder because she is infectiously lovable and funny. The engine inside of her is seemingly infinite, and to see her get her flowers feels delicious.”

Going into the new year, Buteau wants to manifest “more”: more money, more projects, and more possibilities for her 5-year-old twins, Hazel and Otis, whom she welcomed via surrogate in 2019. (“I want the world for them,” she says. “I want them to know that they’re never losing, only learning.”) She credits her husband of 14 years, photographer Gijs van der Most, for pushing her to expect more.

“It’s so corny, but he made me feel like anything was possible,” Buteau says. “My life changed when I had someone who truly understood me and what I could do. And the older I get, I just want to know that I’ve done everything I could to make me happy. I’m looking around at people like, why are we settling for anything? Don’t do that.”

“Unless it’s airplane food. Then you don’t have a choice.”

## USA TODAY BEST-SELLING BOOKS

Booklist will appear in Friday’s edition.



USA TODAY CROSSWORD

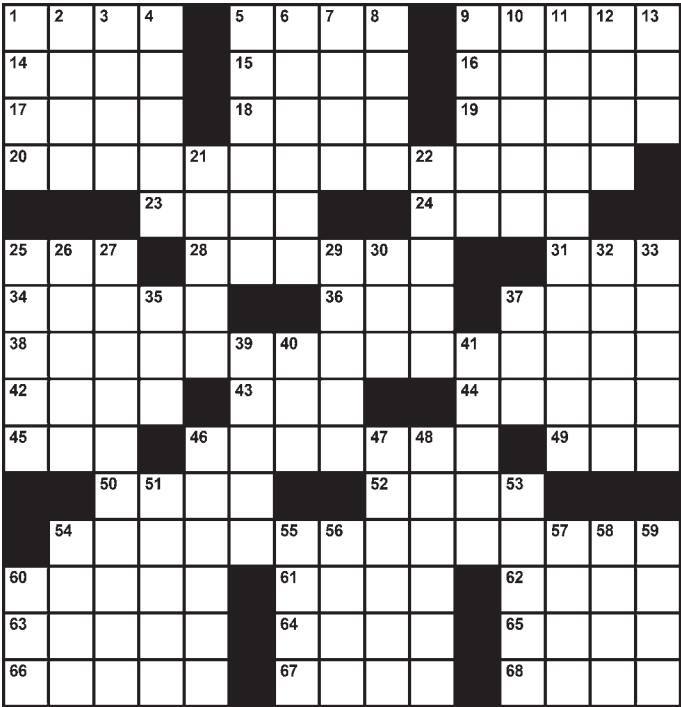
EDITED Anna Gundlach  
BY CJ Tan

BEST PART

ACROSS

- 1 Country that salsa dancing originated in
- 5 Amazes
- 9 Cocoa \_\_\_\_ (cereal)
- 14 Norway's capital
- 15 Sit for a camera
- 16 Bologna's country
- 17 Pub order
- 18 "I'm such a klutz!"
- 19 Book of maps
- 20 Unlikely to sugarcoat things
- 23 Having the wherewithal
- 24 Skin opening
- 25 Pub spigot
- 28 Japanese tree art
- 31 "Hey! I'm a Pomeranian!"
- 34 Love dearly
- 36 Actor McKellen
- 37 Ice sheet
- 38 The middle of a bad situation
- 42 Skin care brand
- 43 \_\_\_\_-Wan Kenobi
- 44 Line on a karaoke screen
- 45 "Jingle Bells" contraction
- 46 Like wushu or mahjongg
- 49 So-so
- 50 Fluid produced by the liver
- 52 Kitty Pryde's superhero team
- 54 Irrelevant to an argument
- 60 Poke fun at
- 61 \_\_\_\_ prep (process of making food for the week)
- 62 Bygone Russian ruler
- 63 Previously aired episode
- 64 Shopping complex
- 65 Furry red Muppet
- 66 Map of Hawaii, often
- 67 Greek god of war
- 68 Homeowner's document

Answers: Call 1-900-988-8300, 99 cents a minute; or, with a credit card, 1-800-320-4280.



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DOWN

- 1 Salad with chicken and eggs
- 2 App store customer
- 3 Chicken cordon \_\_\_\_
- 4 Major artery
- 5 NASA's lunar program
- 6 Like some thick mittens
- 7 Best WNBA Player, for one
- 8 Meeting, informally
- 9 Instrument related to the harpsichord
- 10 Say aloud
- 11 "Actually, there's nothing to worry about!"
- 12 Like seltzer that was left out overnight
- 13 The S in "iOS" (Abbr.)
- 21 "Downton \_\_\_\_"
- 22 Share one's thoughts
- 25 Socially off-limits

- 26 Singer who titles her albums after her age
- 27 Arctic mammals whose fur is actually transparent
- 29 Seated protest
- 30 "That's the spot!"
- 32 \_\_\_\_ the Riveter
- 33 "Go get the ball, Fido!"
- 35 "r u srs rn?"
- 37 "Bossypants" author Tina
- 39 \_\_\_\_ and aahed
- 40 Counter-intelligence org.
- 41 Sound covering a curse word
- 46 Financial adviser's customer
- 47 Yoga instruction
- 48 Gets a whiff of
- 51 Problem to address
- 53 "Got it"
- 54 "I've \_\_\_\_ had!"

- 55 Mackey who played Physicist Barbie
- 56 Drop on the Cat Crying With Laughter emoji
- 57 Dot in the ocean
- 58 Word on a "Hello!" sticker
- 59 Walked heavily
- 60 Prefix meaning "three"



12/31

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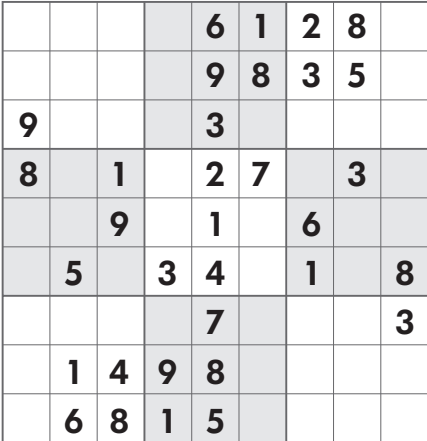
Numbers

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SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

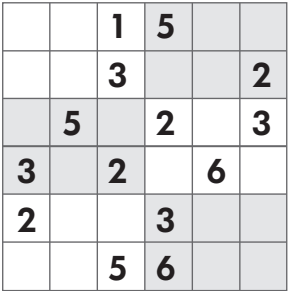


1/2

**SUDOKU FUSION**  
ON YOUR PHONE  
[puzzles.usatoday.com](https://puzzles.usatoday.com)

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Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).



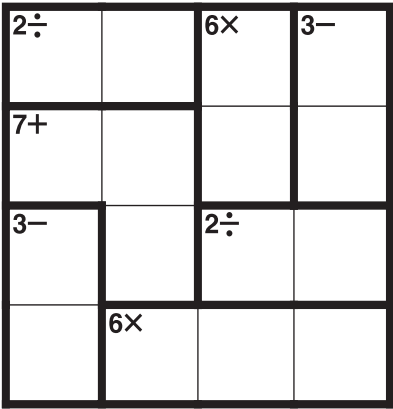
DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★★★

Tuesday's Answers

6	5	8	9	3	7	4	1	2
2	7	3	1	8	4	5	6	9
9	1	4	5	6	2	7	8	3
7	8	6	2	9	3	1	5	4
4	9	2	8	5	1	6	3	7
1	3	5	7	4	6	2	9	8
8	6	1	4	2	9	3	7	5
3	4	9	6	7	5	8	2	1
5	2	7	3	1	8	9	4	6

12/31

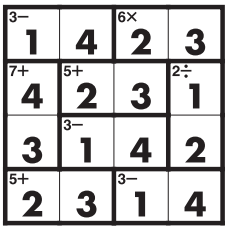
KENKEN



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1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 through 4 (easy) or 1 through 6 (challenging) without repeating.

TUESDAY'S SOLUTION



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3. Freebies: fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.

KUBOK 16

By Davide Coppo

Difficulty: MEDIUM



Solution to Tuesday's puzzle

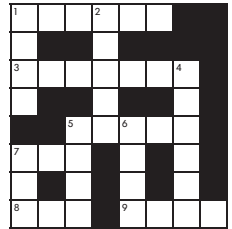
5	13	12	16
7	15	6	11
4	3	10	2
9	8	14	1

Enter the missing numbers from 1 to 16 without repetitions so that the sum of the four numbers in each row and column is the same as the corresponding circled number.

Agency. 1/2/25

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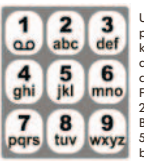
TXTPERT



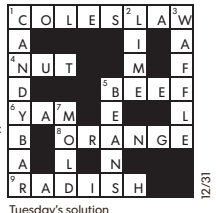
- Across
1. 927437
3. 7238377
5. 24247
7. 227
8. 882
9. 6239
- Down
1. 9675
2. 48824
4. 777823
5. 2742
6. 2886
7. 268

© USA TODAY and Rich Coulter

Today's theme  
House and home



Use the phone keypad to decode the clues.  
For example:  
2 could be A,  
8 or C... and  
5678 could be LOST



12/31

Words

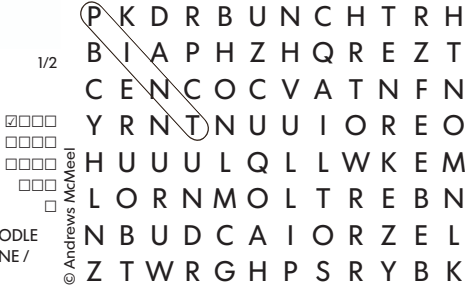
WORD ROUNDUP

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Find and Circle:

- Four units of volume
- Four words ending with CH
- Four units of time (four-letter min.)
- Three types of meat
- Lane of Superman comics

Tuesday's answer: BLUE TEAL GRAY PINK CYAN / POINTER POODLE  
BEAGLE COLLIE BOXER / FRANCE GREECE SPAIN / OLIVER STONE / NEIL



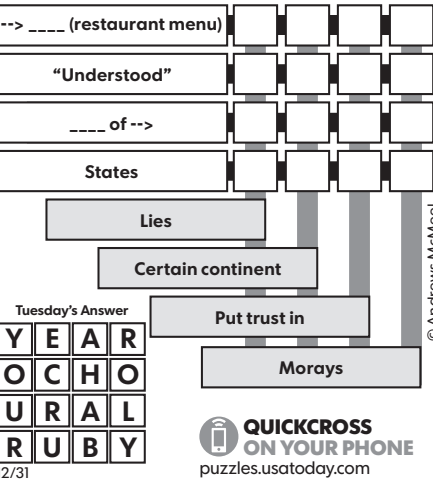
1/2

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QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes

1/2

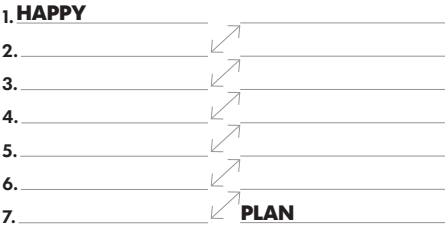


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UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt

1/2



Clues:

1. Phrase sung over cake
2. Type of present
3. Packaging for a surprise
4. Ticket window
5. Structure with cubicles
6. Location for construction
7. Property layout

Tuesday's Answer

- RUNNING
- BACK
- DOOR
- PRIZE
- FIGHT
- CLUB
- SANDWICH
- BACK
- DOOR
- PRIZE
- FIGHT
- CLUB
- SANDWICH

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DON'T QUOTE ME

French writer Albert Camus offers this definition of charm.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.

ASKED CHARM CLEAR GETTING KNOW WAY YES

YOU \_\_\_\_ WHAT \_\_\_\_ IS: A \_\_\_\_ OF \_\_\_\_ THE ANSWER \_\_\_\_ WITHOUT HAVING \_\_\_\_ ANY \_\_\_\_ QUESTION.

1/2

Tuesday's Answer: "Nothing makes you more tolerant of a neighbor's noisy party than being there." - Franklin P. Jones

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

- CLUES
- 1 niacin and thiamin (8)
- 2 they may be filled (5)
- 3 Hugh and Cary (6)
- 4 2023 Disney sci-fi movie (6)
- 5 bad singer Foster Jenkins (8)
- 6 "classy" kid (5)
- 7 fictional Butler (5)
- SOLUTIONS

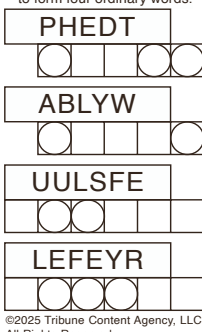


Wednesday's Answers: 1. ANTIPIRACY 2. RELAPSED 3. STUNTS 4. BRADY 5. APPLAUSE 6. ROPE 7. FRESHINGLE

JUMBLE

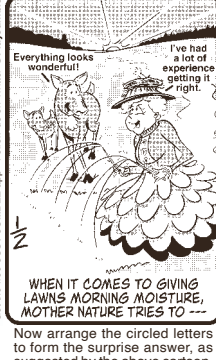
THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME  
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.



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TUESDAY'S ANSWER



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Jumbles: PILOT CLASH DEFEAT BEAKER  
Answer: In Times Square on New Year's Eve, things go flawlessly when someone — DROPS THE BALL

BONUS CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Pointy projection
- 5 Noteworthy times
- 9 Actor — Guinness
- 13 Beach feast
- 14 Planet between Mercury and Earth
- 16 Neap —
- 17 Elevator name
- 18 Additional
- 19 Government agents
- 20 Chinese dumpling in soup
- 22 Uninformed
- 24 Old instrument
- 26 "Simpsons" teacher — Krabappel
- 31 Denominations
- 34 Pinch
- 35 Injures
- 37 Actress — Collette
- 39 Applaud
- 41 Rounded parts
- 43 Practice boxing
- 44 Champion
- 45 Variety show
- 47 DDE's nickname
- 48 Go around
- 51 Supplanted
- 53 Ride a wave
- 55 Cozy home
- 56 Flowers
- 60 Cane for wickerwork
- 64 Portent
- 65 Zebra giraffe
- 67 Writer — Stanley Gardner
- 68 "Your guess is as good as —"
- 69 Fight (Hyph.)
- 70 Unmixed, said of liquor
- 71 Born and —
- 72 High-priced
- 73 Private places

DOWN

- 1 Punch
- 2 Two-seater
- 3 Word in forecasts
- 4 Excited activity
- 5 Ultimate
- 6 Tyrannosaurus
- 7 Against (Prefix)
- 8 Billow
- 9 Pulls in
- 10 Peru's capital
- 11 Place of perfection
- 12 Penny
- 15 Smooths by rubbing
- 21 "That stings!"
- 23 United
- 25 Typo
- 27 Proceed slowly
- 28 "The Nanny" butler
- 29 Burning bit
- 30 Hot coal
- 32 Subject
- 33 Follow a winding path
- 36 Playing card
- 38 Angered
- 40 Killed with arsenic
- 42 Top notch
- 46 Actress — Lanchester
- 49 Sprint
- 50 Threesomes
- 52 Be present at
- 54 Pretended
- 56 Fail utterly
- 57 Arab VIP
- 58 Factor in heredity
- 59 Glut
- 61 Family diagram
- 62 Actor — Alda
- 63 Earns as profit
- 66 Sch. org.

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



1-2-25

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**INSIDE**  
Former Syrian rebels take homes of Assad's officers. **4NN**

SKorea examines airline disaster

Flight recorder to be sent to US for analysis

**Hyonhee Shin and Eduardo Baptista**  
REUTERS

SEOUL – The investigation into the crash of a South Korea passenger jet gathered pace on Wednesday as bereaved families began to prepare funerals after authorities finished formally identifying the 179 victims of the country’s worst air disaster.

The transport ministry said South Korean investigators have extracted the data from the plane’s cockpit voice recorder and will convert it into an audio file, hopefully offering critical information to try to explain the few minutes that led up to the crash.

It could take about two days for investigators to convert the data to audio files, the ministry said.

For the damaged flight data recorder, the investigation team has determined it was not possible to extract its contents in South Korea, and plan to send the black box to the United States in cooperation with the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board for analysis, the ministry said.

All 175 passengers and four of six crew members were killed on Sunday when the Jeju Air jet belly-landed at Muan International Airport in the country’s southwest and slammed into a sand-and-concrete embankment at the end of the runway, where it burst into flames.

Two crew members, located near the tail of the Boeing 737-800, survived.

The government has declared a national mourning period until Jan. 4.

The transport ministry said two more U.S. officials arrived Tuesday to join a team of around two dozen investigators including from the U.S. NTSB, Federal Aviation Administration, and

See SOUTH KOREA, Page 5NN



Officials take part in an investigation Wednesday at the site where a Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 aircraft crashed and burst into flames at Muan International Airport in South Korea. YONHAP/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

CRASH STUNS NEW ORLEANS

At least 15 dead; suspect identified, fatally shot



Law enforcement officers from multiple agencies work the scene on Bourbon Street after a suspect in a rented pickup truck allegedly drove around barricades and through a crowd of New Year’s revelers in New Orleans. MICHAEL DEMOCKER/GETTY IMAGES

**Darren Samuelsohn, Bart Jansen, Claire Thornton and Michael James**  
USA TODAY

An armed man drove a speeding truck into a New Year’s Eve celebration on Bourbon Street in New Orleans’ French Quarter early Wednesday, killing at least 15 and injuring 30 others before being shot and killed by police in what the FBI is calling a terrorist assault.

“We are working with our partners to investigate this as an act of terrorism,” the FBI said in a statement Wednesday morning.

The pick-up truck crashed into the crowd at high speed around 3:15 a.m. and within moments the driver started firing on police officers from inside the vehicle, New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said. Three officers returned fire; two were shot and are being treated in stable condition.

Police confirmed with USA TODAY that the driver was fatally shot by police. “Perpetrator was shot by NOPD officers and killed,” said Karen Boudrie, public relations specialist with New Orleans police.

The suspect in the attack has been preliminarily identified by the FBI as



Police investigators surround a white truck that crashed into a work lift in the French Quarter of New Orleans on Wednesday. At least 15 people were killed when a vehicle plowed into a New Year’s crowd. MATTHEW HINTON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Shamsud Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old U.S. citizen and Army veteran who lived in Texas. Jabbar appeared to be carrying an ISIS flag and was dressed in military gear, the FBI said.

“An ISIS flag was located in the vehicle and the FBI is working to determine the subject’s potential associations and affiliations with terrorist organizations,” the FBI statement said.

Later Wednesday, FBI special agent Alethea Duncan told reporters the ISIS flag was hanging from the truck trailer’s hitch. She also said the bureau does not believe Jabbar was “solely responsible” for the attack.

Duncan, who is in charge of the FBI’s New Orleans office, said authorities also had safely neutralized and removed two potential improvised explosive devices, and are searching for more in the French Quarter.

‘Mission to kill’

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell said multiple times at Wednesday afternoon’s news conference that the site of the truck collision on Bourbon Street remains an “active crime scene” as investigators hunt for details.

Earlier Wednesday, Cantrell told reporters that the driver was on a mission to kill as many people as possible. “He was hell bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did ... This man was trying to run over as many people as he possibly could. It was not a DUI situation,” Cantrell said.

Hundreds of police officers were in the city for New Year’s Eve duty when

See NEW ORLEANS, Page 6NN



Sally Hollis has lived in her Atlanta home since 1988 – one of the homes built in the United States through Habitat for Humanity with the help of former President Jimmy Carter. OCTAVIO JONES/REUTERS

Ga. woman shares Carter’s legacy of work with Habitat

Former president helped build her home in 1988

**Maria Alejandra Cardona**  
REUTERS

ATLANTA – Sally Mae Hollis says she isn’t the sole owner of the house in Atlanta she’s lived in for the past 36 years, graciously telling visitors who stop by: “This is Jimmy’s home!”


That would be Jimmy Carter, the former U.S. president who in 1988, along with his wife, Rosalynn, helped workers from Habitat for Humanity construct the three-bedroom, two-bathroom house where Hollis, 86, has resided ever since.

Carter, who died on Dec. 29 at age 100, was an avid backer of Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit that has helped over 59 million people build or repair homes in more than 70 countries. His Carter Center worked on 4,447 homes in 14 counties, according to the center’s website, with the former president himself swinging a hammer on many of them.

“He was so plain, just like everybody else,” Hollis recalled on Tuesday of Carter when he assisted in constructing the porch of her home. “Jimmy cut the wood, and we finished it that day. That back porch lasted 30 years until I finally

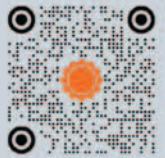
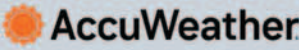
See HABITAT, Page 5NN





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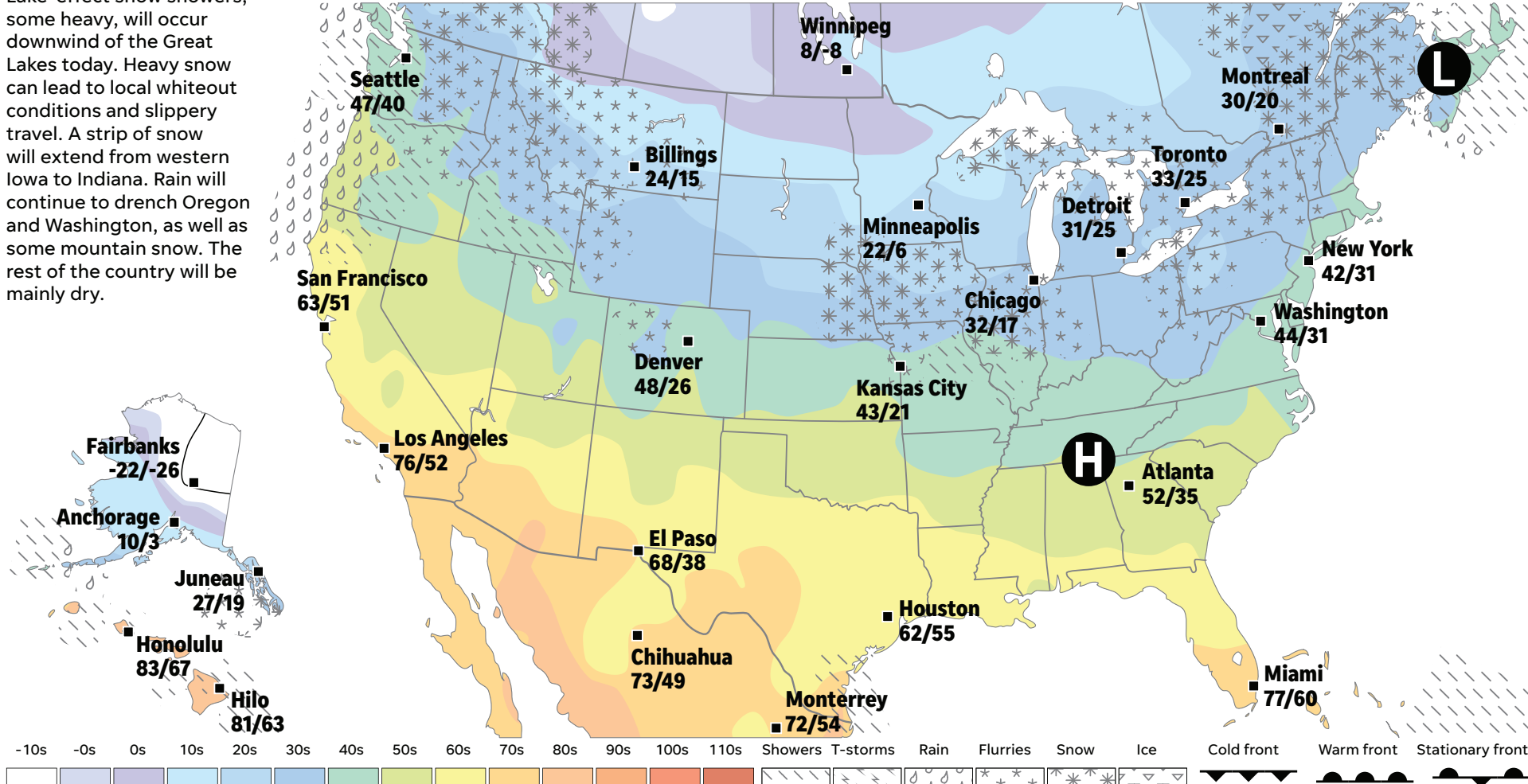


NATIONAL SUMMARY

Lake-effect snow showers, some heavy, will occur downwind of the Great Lakes today. Heavy snow can lead to local whiteout conditions and slippery travel. A strip of snow will extend from western Iowa to Indiana. Rain will continue to drench Oregon and Washington, as well as some mountain snow. The rest of the country will be mainly dry.

In the digital e-edition, you can click anywhere on the US map to get up-to-date forecasts, radar, MinuteCast® and more.

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation for Thursday. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



WEDNESDAY EXTREMES

**NATIONAL** (for the 48 contiguous states)  
**High:** 82 at Fort Lauderdale, FL  
**Low:** -17 at Pinedale, WY  
**Precip:** 1.36" at Rockland, ME

**INTERNATIONAL** (excludes Antarctica)  
**High:** 111 at Julia Creek, Australia  
**Low:** -68 at Oymyakon, Russia  
**Precip:** 2.95" at Neira, Indonesia

TODAY IN HISTORY

The temperature at Haleakala's summit dropped to a frigid 14 on Jan. 2, 1961. Hawaii is known as a tropical paradise, but the high mountains can be surprisingly cold.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

**Q:** On average, which is the snowiest month in the U.S., January or February?

A: February.

NATIONAL CITIES THURSDAY

	High/low/W	Air Quality		High/low/W	Air Quality		High/low/W	Air Quality		High/low/W	Air Quality
Aberdeen, SD	22/2/s	23	● Evansville, IN	43/30/pc	51	● Levittown, PA	41/27/pc	46	● Rochester, NY	33/24/sf	37
Abilene, TX	67/32/s	47	● Fall River, MA	44/29/s	32	● Lincoln, IL	41/20/sn	38	Rockford, IL	31/15/sn	25
Accomac, VA	44/25/s	50	Farmington, NM	51/22/s	48	Louisville, KY	44/34/s	54	Ruidoso, NM	59/38/s	42
● Adrian, MI	32/26/c	50	Fayetteville, NC	52/30/s	50	Lubbock, TX	68/27/s	46	● Salem, OR	50/46/r	33
Akron, OH	28/24/sf	50	Fond du Lac, WI	27/13/c	32	Manitowoc, WI	27/15/c	35	Salina, KS	45/20/c	30
Alamogordo, NM	64/30/s	39	Fort Myers, FL	73/51/pc	37	● Mansfield, OH	28/25/c	47	Salinas, CA	70/48/s	51
Alexandria, VA	43/29/s	55	Fort Smith, AR	53/33/pc	44	Marshall, NC	40/21/pc	50	● Salisbury, MD	43/26/s	51
Alliance, OH	30/24/sf	50	● Framingham, MA	43/30/pc	24	● Marshfield, WI	22/6/c	29	San Angelo, TX	71/33/s	42
Amarillo, TX	56/24/pc	45	Freeport, IL	31/15/sn	32	Massillon, OH	30/24/pc	51	Sarasota, FL	69/48/pc	41
Ames, IA	31/11/sn	28	● Fremont, OH	32/27/c	50	McLean, VA	41/27/s	52	Savannah, GA	59/32/s	51
Anderson, SC	52/31/s	50	Fort Collins, CO	46/22/pc	51	Melbourne, FL	67/47/pc	38	● Sheboygan, WI	28/17/c	33
Appleton, WI	26/14/c	28	Gadsden, AL	50/31/s	52	Memphis, TN	51/38/c	52	Shelby, NC	49/27/s	51
Asheville, NC	44/25/s	51	Gainesville, FL	62/35/pc	50	● Middletown, NY	36/25/pc	35	Sherman, TX	62/36/s	51
● Ashland, OH	29/24/c	50	● Galesburg, IL	35/15/sn	34	● Milford, MA	41/27/pc	25	Shreveport, LA	61/42/s	50
Athens, GA	53/33/s	50	Gastonia, NC	50/28/s	52	● Milwaukee, WI	32/19/pc	43	Silver City, NM	68/31/s	40
Augusta, GA	55/29/s	51	Glen Rose, TX	65/41/pc	50	Monroe, MI	32/27/c	51	Sioux Falls, SD	27/9/sn	24
Austin, TX	64/48/pc	50	Gonzales, LA	66/52/s	50	Monroe, LA	60/40/s	51	● Somerset, PA	26/23/sn	50
Bartlesville, OK	51/24/pc	47	Great Falls, MT	16/8/c	48	Montgomery, AL	57/32/s	51	● Somerville, NJ	41/27/pc	42
● Battle Creek, MI	30/23/c	42	Green Bay, WI	26/14/c	25	● Muncie, IN	35/22/pc	42	● South Bend, IN	32/23/c	39
● Bedford, IN	39/27/pc	50	Greenville, SC	51/30/pc	51	Murfreesboro, TN	48/33/c	52	Spartanburg, SC	50/30/pc	51
● Binghamton, NY	30/22/sf	32	● Hackensack, NJ	42/31/pc	44	Naples, FL	74/53/pc	31	● Springfield, IL	40/20/sn	40
Bluffton, SC	56/35/s	48	Hagerstown, MD	36/27/pc	50	Nashville, TN	49/36/pc	52	Springfield, MO	47/25/c	42
Bremerton, WA	44/40/sh	35	Hattiesburg, MS	63/41/s	44	● Neptune, NJ	42/28/pc	35	St. Augustine, FL	58/41/pc	47
● Brockton, MA	44/29/pc	29	● Henderson, KY	43/30/pc	52	● New Bedford, MA	45/30/s	26	St. Cloud, MN	18/4/pc	15
Brownwood, TX	70/35/pc	48	Hendersonville, NC	45/26/s	51	● New Bern, NC	50/30/s	38	St. George, UT	57/33/s	49
Burlington, IA	35/16/sn	33	● Herkimer, NY	34/24/sf	33	New Philadelphia, OH	32/24/pc	50	Staunton, VA	40/23/s	46
Burlington, NC	47/26/s	50	● Hillsdale, MI	29/23/c	49	Newark, OH	34/27/c	49	● Stevens Point, WI	24/10/c	28
● Burlington, VT	35/25/sf	25	Holland, MI	30/25/c	38	● Newton, NJ	39/26/c	41	Stockton, CA	61/45/pc	53
Cambridge, OH	34/28/c	45	● Hornell, NY	32/24/sf	39	● New York, NY	42/31/pc	51	● Stroudsburg, PA	36/25/c	46
Camdenton, MO	46/24/c	45	Houma, LA	67/54/s	36	● Norwich, CT	41/26/pc	21	Stuart, FL	72/55/pc	35
● Canandaigua, NY	33/25/sf	34	● Howell, MI	29/23/c	50	Ocala, FL	63/36/pc	49	Sturgis, MI	31/24/c	46
Canton, OH	29/24/sf	51	Hutchinson, KS	46/19/pc	32	Oklahoma City, OK	53/29/pc	48	Tallahassee, FL	63/32/s	50
Carlsbad, NM	66/32/s	51	● Hyannis, MA	43/30/pc	27	Opelousas, LA	63/50/pc	51	Thibodaux, LA	66/53/s	47
● Chambersburg, PA	36/25/pc	50	● Indianapolis, IN	37/23/sn	50	Oshkosh, WI	26/12/c	25	Topeka, KS	46/21/c	25
● Cherry Hill, NJ	41/28/s	51	Iowa City, IA	33/15/sn	36	Palm Beach, FL	75/59/pc	33	Tuscaloosa, AL	55/33/s	51
● Cincinnati, OH	39/29/c	50	● Ithaca, NY	32/23/sf	29	Palm Springs, CA	77/49/s	82	● Utica, NY	32/23/sn	28
Clarksville, TN	47/35/pc	51	Jackson, MS	60/38/s	51	Panama City, FL	62/42/pc	45	Ventura, CA	64/49/s	58
● Coldwater, MI	30/23/c	47	Jackson, TN	50/37/c	49	● Pekin, IL	40/19/sn	42	Victorville, CA	68/35/s	56
Columbus, OH	35/30/c	47	Jacksonville, FL	62/34/s	50	Pensacola, FL	61/44/s	51	● Vineland, NJ	42/26/s	50
● Corning, NY	34/26/sf	37	Jacksonville, NC	50/29/s	37	● Peoria, IL	38/18/sn	39	Visalia, CA	60/43/pc	52
Corpus Christi, TX	70/60/pc	45	Kent, OH	30/24/sf	51	Petersburg, VA	47/26/s	51	Washington, DC	44/31/s	52
Daytona Beach, FL	61/43/pc	49	● Kewanee, IL	34/16/sn	37	Phoenix, AZ	76/48/s	76	Watertown, SD	18/1/s	22
Deming, NM	69/30/s	50	● Keyser, WV	34/28/pc	51	● Port Huron, MI	30/23/c	43	● Wausau, WI	21/9/c	24
DeRidder, LA	62/48/pc	48	Kinston, NC	49/28/s	43	● Portsmouth, NH	41/29/pc	18	Waynesboro, PA	36/26/pc	50
Des Moines, IA	31/14/sn	31	Knoxville, TN	44/30/s	51	● Poughkeepsie, NY	40/28/c	32	● White Plains, NY	40/28/pc	37
● Detroit, MI	31/25/c	53	● Lafayette, IN	36/18/sn	41	● Providence, RI	43/29/pc	25	Wichita Falls, TX	61/30/s	45
Devils Lake, ND	3/-9/pc	23	Lafayette, LA	65/52/c	47	Pueblo, CO	50/19/pc	48	● Wilmington, DE	42/27/s	52
● Dover, NH	40/26/pc	23	Lakeland, FL	65/45/pc	50	● Quincy, MA	44/30/s	29	Wilmington, NC	53/31/s	43
El Paso, TX	68/38/s	52	Lansing, MI	28/22/c	48	● Redding, CA	60/49/sh	45	● Wisconsin Rapids, WI	24/9/c	31
● Elmira, NY	35/27/sf	37	Las Cruces, NM	66/36/s	51	Reno, NV	57/35/c	53	Wooster, OH	30/25/c	44
● Erie, PA	33/27/sn	45	● Lebanon, PA	37/26/c	50	Ravenna, OH	31/24/sf	51	● Worcester, MA	38/26/pc	26
● Eugene, OR	51/48/r	22	Leesburg, FL	63/44/pc	50	● Richmond, IN	36/27/pc	48	York, PA	39/27/pc	50

Air Quality Index: 0-50, Good; 51-100, Moderate; 101-150, Unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151-200, Unhealthy; 201-300, Very unhealthy; 301-500, Hazardous

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

	Thursday High/low/W	Friday High/low/W		Thursday High/low/W	Friday High/low/W		Thursday High/low/W	Friday High/low/W		Thursday High/low/W	Friday High/low/W
Acapulco	87/70/c	87/70/pc	● Cape Town	79/65/s	80/62/s	La Paz	59/40/r	58/42/r	San Jose	81/67/c	82/67/c
Addis Ababa	73/47/s	73/47/pc	Caracas	88/74/sh	89/74/r	Lagos	92/78/pc	92/78/pc	San Salvador	84/63/c	84/62/pc
Algiers	63/46/sh	65/42/s	Casablanca	69/37/s	72/38/pc	Lima	75/66/c	77/67/pc	Santiago	90/57/s	89/57/s
Amman	57/36/s	59/37/pc	● Colombo	84/76/r	88/75/pc	Lisbon	57/45/c	60/49/c	● Sao Paulo	86/70/r	84/68/t
Amsterdam	43/35/sh	41/34/pc	● Copenhagen	37/31/sf	35/29/sf	London	41/27/s	40/30/s	● Sarajevo	44/36/pc	43/19/c
Ankara	47/24/pc	46/29/pc	Damascus	56/31/s	56/31/s	Madrid	47/31/pc	46/32/c	Shanghai	58/39/pc	52/37/pc
Asuncion	90/72/r	93/72/t	Dublin	38/27/s	38/29/s	Manila	88/77/t	88/76/sh	● Singapore	88/77/t	88/76/t
Athens	60/43/pc	61/46/s	● Geneva	46/33/r	40/25/pc	Mexico City	70/45/c	68/46/pc	Stockholm	22/14/pc	19/10/s
● Auckland	72/63/sh	71/60/sh	● Guatemala City	72/58/t	71/56/c	Milan	46/36/c	50/35/pc	Sydney	73/68/sh	77/67/pc
Baghdad	66/40/pc	64/37/pc	Hanoi	77/61/pc	80/60/pc	Mombasa	91/77/sh	91/77/pc	Taipei	66/59/sh	64/58/c
Bangkok	90/67/s	91/71/c	● Harare	79/65/t	75/64/t	Montevideo	78/61/s	73/63/pc	Tegucigalpa	76/63/c	73/61/c
Beijing	41/13/pc	43/13/pc	Havana	81/61/c	80/63/pc	● Montreal	30/20/sf	24/11/c	Tehran	46/33/s	47/32/s
Beirut	65/52/pc	65/52/s	Helsinki	29/26/c	29/19/c	● Moscow	38/24/sn	28/21/pc	Tokyo	54/41/s	50/38/r
Belgrade	45/38/s	44/28/r	Hong Kong	69/61/pc	69/58/pc	● Nairobi	80/60/s	79/60/sh	● Toronto	33/25/sf	30/19/sf
Berlin	42/31/pc	36/29/sn	Jakarta	91/75/t	90/76/t	New Delhi	67/47/pc	72/47/pc	Tunis	61/50/r	63/51/r
● Bogota	67/49/r	66/50/r	Jerusalem	56/37/s	58/40/pc	Panama City	85/73/r	86/73/r	Vancouver	42/36/r	43/42/r
Brussels	42/33/pc	38/31/s	● Johannesburg	74/61/t	78/61/t	Paris	42/29/r	39/27/s	● Vienna	38/33/c	40/29/s
Bucharest	50/33/s	49/35/c	● Kabul	37/33/r	38/30/r	Port-au-Prince	90/64/s	91/65/pc	Warsaw	45/29/r	35/26/sn
Budapest	45/33/pc	40/27/pc	Khartoum	84/62/pc	87/64/pc	● Rio de Janeiro	85/74/t	88/75/s	Yerevan	37/19/s	36/18/s
Buenos Aires	87/61/s	82/62/s	Kyiv	49/33/s	36/28/pc	Riyadh	64/40/pc	63/37/pc	● Zagreb	50/35/pc	42/24/sn
Cairo	68/50/s	68/51/s	Kingston	89/75/pc	86/75/c	● Rome	58/52/pc	58/40/r	● Zurich	47/29/r	34/21/c

● Denotes possible travel delays Thursday

Weather(W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice.





ASIA

# We the People

In December, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol shocked South Koreans and the rest of the world by declaring martial law, only to be forced to backtrack hours later by outraged lawmakers.

That miscalculation by Yoon was a thunderous crescendo to a year that tested democracy across Asia as millions of people went to the polls, faced political crises, repression or even threats to their democratic systems.

In some cases, people power won, and it won big. Analysts say that 2025 promises more tests, more turmoil, and, possibly, more shows of democratic resilience.

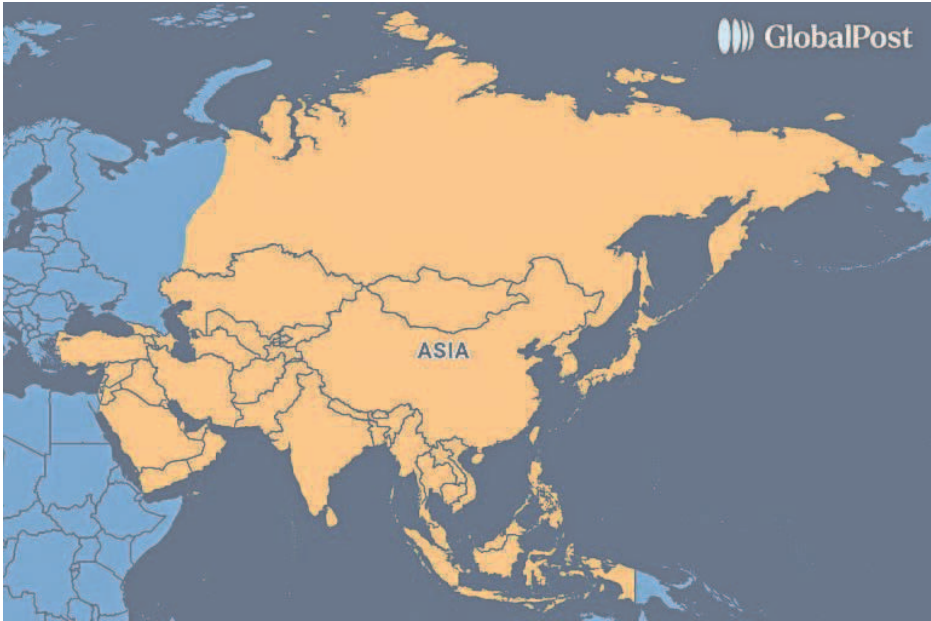
For South Korea, Asia's fourth largest economy, a bastion of stability, and a key Western strategic partner, 2025 will start out in limbo. Yoon is out, for now, after being impeached in a second attempt by lawmakers in mid-December. Interim President Han Duck-soo, who took over after Yoon's impeachment, was himself impeached less than two weeks later.

Analysts say that while the country evaded a coup, it's shaken and the impacts will continue to reverberate in 2025, with the chaos putting the country at "grave risk."

"The political mess Yoon created is one modern history's worst self-inflicted economic wounds ... and left Seoul in disarray," wrote Forbes.

The country is in political limbo and will remain so until judges decide Yoon's fate. Still, the public fury to the martial law announcement showed the resilience of the country's democratic system, wrote Lauren D. Gilbert of the Atlantic Council.

"The South Korean people fought with blood, sweat, and tears to institute a true democracy," she said. (Yoon's) move was undoubtedly one step too far for the South Korean public and the calls for impeachment were a statement from the population."



Elsewhere in Asia, there were less dramatic if not less consequential political tremors, and overall, the "year of elections" that saw millions of voters go to the polls in India, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan and elsewhere didn't necessarily strengthen democracy, wrote the Council on Foreign Relations.

In some countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, authoritarian leaders used tactics such as electoral fraud, political detentions, and other measures to manipulate the vote and secure their hold on power. In Bangladesh, the opposition didn't even bother to show up for elections early last year.

In Pakistan, anti-government protests broke out continually in 2024 over the jailing of opposition leader Imran Khan on numerous charges even as candidates backed by his party took a plurality in elections in January in spite of vigorous attempts by the government to prevent such wins. But then Pakistan today, say analysts, is more or less a military state, and far more authoritarian than it was several years ago: "Creeping authoritarianism (in Pakistan) threatens democracy for decades to come," wrote the South China Morning Post.

Next door, in the world's largest democracy, Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party in 2024 took the most votes overall in an election marked by intimidation of the press, civil society, and opponents, the demonization of the Muslim minority and other measures to create an unfair advantage. Even so, the party lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since coming to power a decade ago. That could have consequences in 2025 as the party tries to implement its agenda, wrote the Economist. Already it has tempered Modi's Hindu-nationalist agenda and some of his strongman instincts, the magazine added.

Indonesia, meanwhile, saw a change in leadership in 2024 that essentially followed a classic horse trade: Popular former President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, once a heralded reformer, traded his endorsement of a disgraced general, Prabowo Subianto, in exchange for his son, Gibran Rakabuming Rakarun, being put on the ticket as Prabowo's number two. The son, with no political experience, was too young legally to run – until the top court, run by Jokowi's brother-in-law – changed the rules. Prabowo won handily.

Now, wrote World Politics Review, a few months after taking office, it's likely that Prabowo and Jokowi in 2025 may also further degrade Indonesia's democracy.

In some Asian countries, elections meant little when governing institutions moved to block their results. In Thailand, the country's top court banned the Move Forward party in August, a progressive party that had won the most seats in the country's parliamentary elections a year earlier but was unable to form a majority.

In February, Thais are scheduled to vote in a referendum on a new constitution, one that is expected to deepen democracy. However, the vote is likely to be postponed, wrote the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

In neighboring Myanmar, meanwhile, weapons have replaced the ballot box since a military coup in 2021 usurped power from a democratically elected government. A powerful insurgency, however, is threatening the military junta's hold on the country. In December, the rebel Arakan Army wrested control of the country's entire western border in another humiliation for the junta, the BBC reported.

Analysts say they expect to see more losses by the military government in 2025 and possibly peace negotiations because of pressure on both sides to come to the bargaining table. The junta has vowed to hold elections next year, but analysts say these are empty promises.

While many voters in Asia will face a simmering status quo in 2025, others are getting a fresh start, brought about by the shocks administered via a fed-up and impatient electorate.

In Sri Lanka, voters in 2024 kicked out the political establishment and ushered in a left-leaning leader and his party, in a stunning parliamentary and presidential election upset. This promises to dramatically reshape the economy and upend its corruption, analysts say.

In another shock election in Asia, Japan's powerful Liberal Democratic Party, which has ruled the country for most of the past 70 years, lost its majority in parliament.

Analysts say Japan will face "a new normal" of uncertainty and possibly instability with frequent changes of government.

# Israel strikes Gaza City suburb, killing at least 8

## Former defense minister resigns from parliament

Nidal al-Mughrabi, Maytaal Angel, Maayan Lubell and Ali Sawafta  
REUTERS

CAIRO – The Israeli military kept up the pressure on northern Gaza on Wednesday, striking in a suburb of Gaza City, medics said, and told residents in a central part of the enclave to evacuate from an area where militants were firing rockets.

Air strikes in Shejaia, a suburb of Gaza City, killed at least eight Palestinians, according to local emergency services.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military, and it was not immediately clear who was killed in the attack.

In al-Buriej, in central Gaza, the Israeli military said it struck a militant operating in an area where rockets had been fired into Israel the previous day. Its Arabic spokesman had ordered people to leave the area before the strike.

The Palestinian news agency WAFA said two people were killed in that strike and 15 more in an airstrike in Jabalia. There was no immediate confirmation from Gaza health officials. Israel's military said it killed Hamas fighters in the attack.

Much of the area around the northern towns of Beit Hanoun, Jabalia and Beit Lahiya has been cleared of people and razed, fuelling speculation, which Israel denies, that it intends to keep the area as a buffer zone after the fighting in Gaza ends.

Israel says its almost three-month-old campaign in northern Gaza is aimed at preventing Hamas militants from regrouping. Its instructions to civilians to evacuate are meant to keep them out of harm's way, the military says.

Palestinian and United Nations officials say no place is safe in Gaza and that evacuations worsen the humanitarian conditions of the population.

According to the Palestinian civil defense, more than 1,500 tents sheltering displaced people across Gaza were flooded by heavy rains over the past two days, leaving people exposed to the cold, their belongings damaged.



Smoke rises from an Israeli strike as the Israeli military conducts operations inside the Gaza Strip on Wednesday. KAI PFAFFENBACH/REUTERS

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 45,500 Palestinians, according to health officials in the Hamas-run enclave. Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced and much of the tiny coastal strip is in ruins.

The war was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, in which 1,200 people were killed and another 251 taken hostage to Gaza, according to Israeli tallies.

### Israel's former deference chief Gallant quits parliament

Former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who had often taken an independent line against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right government allies, said on Wednesday he was resigning from parliament.

Gallant was fired from the government in November by Netanyahu, after months of disagreements over the con-

duct of the war against Hamas in Gaza, but kept his seat as an elected member of the Knesset.

"Just as it is on the battlefield, so it is in public service. There are moments in which one must stop, assess and choose a direction in order to achieve the goals," Gallant said in a televised statement.

Gallant had often broken ranks with Netanyahu and his coalition allies of far-right and religious parties, including over exemptions granted to ultra-Orthodox Jewish men from serving in the conscript military – a hot button issue.

In March 2023, Netanyahu fired Gallant after he urged a halt to a highly contested government plan to cut the Supreme Court's powers. His dismissal triggered mass protests and Netanyahu backtracked.

The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Gallant and Netanyahu, along with a Hamas leader, for alleged war crimes and crimes

against humanity in the Gaza conflict, which Israel has contested.

### Gaza population down by 6% since start of war

The population of Gaza has fallen 6% since the war with Israel began nearly 15 months ago as about 100,000 Palestinians left the enclave while more than 55,000 are presumed dead, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

Around 45,500 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, have been killed since the war began but another 11,000 are missing, the bureau said, citing numbers from the Palestinian Health Ministry.

As such, the population of Gaza has declined by about 160,000 during the course of the war to 2.1 million, with more than a million or 47% of the total children under the age of 18, the PCBS said.

It added that Israel has "ragged a brutal aggression against Gaza targeting all kinds of life there; humans, buildings and vital infrastructure ... entire families were erased from the civil register. There are catastrophic human and material losses."

Israel's foreign ministry said the PCBS data was "fabricated, inflated, and manipulated in order to vilify Israel."

Israel has faced accusations of genocide in Gaza because of the scale of death and destruction.

The International Court of Justice, the United Nations' highest legal body, ruled last January that Israel must prevent acts of genocide against Palestinians, while Pope Francis has suggested the global community should study whether Israel's Gaza campaign constitutes genocide.

Israel has repeatedly rejected accusations of genocide, saying it abides by international law and has a right to defend itself.

The PCBS said some 22% of Gaza's population faces catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity, according to the criteria of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a global monitor. Included in that are some 3,500 children at risk of death due to malnutrition and lack of food, the bureau said.



# Italy’s luxury goods under microscope

Inspections often limited to direct suppliers, not to subcontractors

Elisa Anzolin, Emilio Parodi and Silvia Ognibene

REUTERS

MILAN – LVMH-owned Dior’s production arm in Italy, Manufactures Dior, relied on formal inspections to assess working and safety standards inside its supply chain last year. In some cases, such certifications missed glaring problems, a Reuters review of unpublished court documents has found.

AZ Operations, a subcontractor of Manufactures Dior tasked with the production of leather items and based near Italy’s fashion capital Milan, was accused by Italian prosecutors in June of being a front for an operation that exploited workers.

However, AZ Operations passed two environmental and social inspections in 2023, in January and July, according to unpublished audit documents reviewed by Reuters. Widespread Milan investigations have uncovered malpractice inside the Italian luxury goods supply chain of Dior, Giorgio Armani and Alvie-ro Martini this year, Reuters has previously reported.

The audit papers, along with court documents, Reuters interviews with more than two dozen luxury sector workers, auditors, supply chain managers, suppliers, lawyers, industry experts, executives and trade union representatives reveal the pervasiveness of ineffective checks of social and environmental standards inside Italy’s sprawling luxury supply chain.

In the case of AZ Operations, a three-page assessment on letterhead from compliance management company Fair Factories Clearinghouse, carried out by monitor Adamo Adriano on Jan. 18, 2023, stated that AZ Operations did not have subcontractors. The audit listed no irregularities.

In July 2023, a further audit by Davide Albertario Milano, a large direct supplier of Manufactures Dior that worked with AZ Operations, also found “no nonconformities” and certified the work was carried out to a high standard and in accordance with contractual terms.

Despite passing the audits, a police investigation into its 2023 activities found AZ Operations was “de facto non-existent,” according to Milan court documents. Furthermore, police inspections in April 2024 alleged the company was a front for a separate business, New Leather Italy, that exploited undocumented workers in sweatshop-like conditions, the same documents showed. That discovery was one of the factors that prompted Milan’s prosecutors to put Manufactures Dior under court administration in June.

Dior and LVMH did not respond to multiple requests for comment about Reuters’ findings, including the audits, and on the process to inspect external manufacturers in Italy.

In a July statement following revelations from the Milan prosecutors’ inquiries, Dior said it firmly condemned illegal practices discovered at two of its contractors, saying such unworthy acts contradicted “its values and the code of conduct signed by these suppliers.”



In a July statement, Dior said it firmly condemned illegal practices discovered at two of its contractors. GUGLIELMO MANGIAPANE/REUTERS

“Aware of the gravity of the violations committed by these suppliers and the improvements to be made to its checks and procedures, the house of Dior is collaborating with the designated Italian administrator and the Italian authorities,” the French brand also said at the time.

Dior added in the statement that its teams were working intensely to reinforce the existing procedures: “Despite regular audits, these two suppliers had evidently succeeded in hiding these practices.”

After this article was published, FFC-owner Worldly responded to Reuters queries saying it had never offered facility auditing services to Worldly or FFC users, adding it asks that customers enlist external verifiers to ensure impartial, transparent audits. “Regarding the letterhead in the court documents, this is a template available to customers within the FFC platform,” Worldly added in its statement.

Adamo Adriano did not respond to Reuters attempts to reach them. Davide Albertario did not respond to queries by Reuters on inspections at AZ Operations. New Leather Italy did not reply to a Reuters request for comment.

### ‘Cost-reduction’

Global luxury groups including LVMH usually outsource most of their production to a myriad of external contractors, industry experts say.

Many are based in Italy, famed for its artisanal skills and accounting for between 50% and 55% of the global production of luxury clothing and leather goods, consultancy Bain calculates.

“No matter how many controls we do, there is always something we miss,” Renzo Rosso, founder of Italian fashion group OTB, which makes Diesel clothing, told a business event in September, in reference to the complexity of over-seeing Italy’s supply chain.

Despite the risks, insiders and experts told Reuters relying on suppliers is a deliberate strategy to keep costs down and manage demand.

“The fashion business model is driven by cost-reduction tactics, leading fashion brands to switch suppliers,” said Hakan Karaosman, Associate Professor at Cardiff University, whose research focuses on supply chain sustainability.

Even though Dior did not directly abuse workers, the mechanism of labor exploitation “was culpably fueled by Manufactures Dior which... did not carry out effective inspections or audits over the years to ascertain the actual working conditions and environment,” Milan prosecutors said in the June court documents.

Currently, there is no firm legal requirement in Italy for luxury groups to audit their suppliers. But poor oversight can clash with sustainability claims made to investors and consumers over craftsmanship and corporate and social responsibility standards, leading to reputational risks and in some cases civil liability if workers’ exploitation is found within the supply chain.

LVMH, for example, said in its 2023 Social and Environmental Responsibility Report it “endeavors to ensure its suppliers and their service providers uphold human rights and to support them with applying the best possible employment, health and safety conditions.” The investigations into Italy’s luxury supply chain have prompted some LVMH shareholders to ask the \$330-billion behemoth, owned by French billionaire Bernard Arnault, to better monitor how its contractors treat workers.

LVMH told a group of investors in November it was auditing all of its direct suppliers and immediate contractors. In a subsequent statement to Reuters in November, LVMH said it had conducted more than 2,600 on-site audits globally this year. Italy’s antitrust authority said in July it was investigating whether Dior and Armani have misled consumers.

In July, Armani expressed confidence in a “positive result following the (antitrust) investigation,” saying in a statement that its companies were fully committed to cooperating with the authorities and that it believed the allegations had no merit.

### Skin-deep oversight

Brands dictate the depth of the checks and the auditors’ scope of action and inspections are often limited to direct suppliers and not to subcontractors, where the biggest problems usually lie, four auditors and luxury goods supply chain managers Reuters spoke to said.

Audits tend to be planned in advance,

allowing suppliers to paint a better picture by, for instance, clearing premises of workers without proper contracts, these people said.

On May 9, 2023, for example, external auditor Adamo Adriano sent Pelletterie Elisabetta Yang, another supplier of Manufactures Dior based near Milan, a written notice flagging that he would hold an inspection on May 26, 2023, the audit documents show.

In the notice, Adriano asked to analyze employment contracts, organizational charts, pay slips and a dozen more documents.

The check-up did take place, but it was “more formal than substantial,” investigators wrote of the audit. The assessment listed no irregularities.

In March 2024, police entered Elisabetta Yang’s workshop, which housed also a refectory and several bedrooms. They found 23 workers, five of which were irregular. The workers lived and worked “in hygiene and health conditions that are below the minimum required,” the court documents read.

Adriano did not reply to Reuters requests to comment with regards to the audit of Elisabetta Yang. Reuters was not able to contact Elisabetta Yang at the official email addresses cited by the local chamber of commerce.

As private actors, auditors cannot freely access factories or workshops outside agreed hours and may not collect documents that are not spontaneously submitted by suppliers, two Italy-based luxury supply chain auditors told Reuters.

The time allocated for on-site inspections is often too short to examine documents and interview employees, these people said.

Five Tuscany-based luxury chain workers employed at separate workshops serving major brands confirmed to Reuters workshop owners knew in advance of the audits and would clear their premises and prep staff on what answers to give monitoring teams on the day of an inspection.

All declined to be named for fear of losing their job.

“We used to say we only worked four hours a day, as per our (formal) part-time contract,” said Pakistani-born Abbas, who works in the leathermaking hub of Prato.

“But how could they think we were making 1,300 bags a day with 50 workers employed only four hours a day?” Abbas, who said he worked 14 hours a day, six days a week, added.

On the day of the audit, employees with part-time contracts were asked to leave as soon as they finished their formal shift, but had to come back and continue work after the auditors left, he added.

Another worker, also from Pakistan and employed at a separate leather workshop in the Florence area, said factory owners warned workers when the inspection would take place and asked them to lie about their working hours. Fabio Roia, President of the Court of Milan, told Reuters that companies don’t invest enough in their control systems and don’t normally question the extremely cheap prices contractors offer to provide goods or services.

Dior and Armani are still under special judicial oversight as part of the Milan’s investigation into labor exploitation.

# Former Syrian rebels take homes of Assad’s officers

Families being evicted from subsidized housing

Riham Alkousaa

REUTERS

DAMASCUS – Families of military officers who served under Syria’s ousted Bashar Assad are being evicted from their subsidized housing at a compound outside Damascus to make way for victorious former rebels and their families, residents and fighters there said.

The Muadamiyat al-Sham compound housing hundreds of people in over a dozen buildings is one of several such areas set aside for officers under Assad’s rule.

As the military is being restructured around the former rebel forces, with Assad-era officers demobilized, the evictions from military housing are not a surprise.

But their rapid replacement in the accommodation by fighters who spent years in impoverished, rural rebel-held territory shows the sudden reversal of fortune for supporters of each side in the conflict.

Names of rebel factions under the

main victorious Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which captured the capital on Dec. 8, are scrawled in spray paint on the entrances to buildings, apparently marking them out for fighters from each entity.

Three fighters at the compound, four women who have been residing there and a local official providing documents to those leaving said officers’ families had been given five days to go.

“We will start moving our children’s schools, starting our lives over. I am very sad, my heart is broken, it’s our lives, my children’s lives,” said Budour Makdid, 38, the wife of a former military intelligence officer living in Muadamiyat al-Sham.

Makdid’s husband, who has signed papers recognizing the new authorities and handed over his gun, has already returned to his family home in Latakia province, a former Assad stronghold, and Makdid and their children would join him there, she said.

Like other families leaving the area, she needed a document from the municipal authorities to say the family was leaving the accommodation and giving permission to remove their belongings.

Local administrator Khalil al-Ahmad,



A Hayat Tahrir al-Sham fighter walks alongside workers putting out the belongings of the families of former soldiers and officers of Assad’s regime army at an apartment in Syria Dec. 29. AMR ABDALLAH DALSH/REUTERS

69, said families had started approaching him several days ago seeking the document and that around 200 requests for one had been made so far.

Ahmad said he had not been officially contacted by the new administration about the change, and was only made aware of it when residents began to ask him for the documents.

A spokesman for HTS did not imme-

diately respond to requests for comment.

Any sign of how Syria’s new administration intends to handle former Assad officers, as well as property rights, will be closely watched in a country where millions of people have been displaced since civil war erupted in 2011.

Earlier this month, HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa was filmed requesting the residents of his family’s former home in Damascus to leave and allow his own family to move back.

Some former military families living near the Muadamiyat al-Sham compound but not in the subsidized units from which officers are being evicted are also leaving.

Eidye Zaitoun, 52, was packing her belongings into black plastic bags as she prepared to leave her two-room apartment for the coast. She said her son in the military had moved to the coast too and there was no reason for her to stay.

HTS fighters at the compound were not sympathetic.

“We were displaced out of homes, out of our regions on a moonless night with only the clothes we were wearing. Thank God they are now allowed to take out their belongings,” one said.





An installation with the logo of Moldovagaz energy company is seen in Chisinau, Moldova, on Tuesday. Government spokesman Daniel Voda said all Moldovan energy consumers were secure, and that the country’s thermal power plants were operating normally. VLADISLAV CULIOMZA/REUTERS

# Moldovan region forced to cut heating, hot water

Alexander Tanas and Mark Trevelyan  
REUTERS

CHISINAU – The breakaway Moldovan region of Transdnistria cut heating and hot water supplies to households on Wednesday after Russia stopped supplying gas to central and eastern Europe via Ukraine.

The severing of the gas flow was felt immediately in the mainly Russian-speaking territory of about 450,000 people, which split from Moldova in the early 1990s as the Soviet Union collapsed. Russia has about 1,500 troops stationed there.

“There is no heating or hot water,” an employee of local energy company Tirassteploenergo told Reuters by phone. She said she did not know how long the situation would last.

The gas supply was cut in the early hours of Wednesday following the expiration of a gas transit agreement between warring neighbors Russia and Ukraine.

Transdnistria’s leader, Vadim Krasnoselsky, said the situation was “not an easy one, but on the whole, we were prepared.”

He said the cutoff was rooted in a dispute over payment of arrears between Moldova and Russian gas giant Gazprom.

“Things will get better. Think about yourself, your family, your loved ones,” he added.

The flow of Russian gas through Ukraine stopped when Kyiv refused to extend a transit agreement amid the 34-month-old war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Wednesday described the end of gas transit as “one of Moscow’s biggest defeats.” He said it was now Europe’s “joint task” to support Moldo-

va “in this period of energy transformation.”

Russia had been pumping about 2 billion cubic meters of gas per year to Transdnistria, including a power plant that provided energy for the whole of Moldova, a country of 2.5 million people that wants to join the European Union. The ex-Soviet state has a long history of gas payment disputes and tense relations with Russia.

Moldova says it is taking measures to cut its energy consumption by at least a third. It plans to meet 38% of its needs by domestic production, including 10% from renewable energy, and import the remaining 62% from neighboring Romania.

Government spokesman Daniel Voda said on Wednesday that all Moldovan energy consumers were secure, and that the country’s thermal power plants were operating normally. He added that Moldova’s gas reserves would suffice for the cold period.

Voda said, without providing details, that the government supported residents of Transdnistria and was “looking for alternative solutions to provide them with heat and energy.”

In Transdnistria, the local energy company’s website said the cutoff of heating and hot water took effect at 7 a.m. local time, but some facilities such as hospitals were exempt.

It urged residents to dress warmly, gather family members together in a single room, hang blankets or thick curtains over windows and balcony doors, and use electric heaters.

The temperature in Transdnistria’s main city, Tiraspol, was 39 degrees Fahrenheit on Wednesday. Olga, a 42-year-old mother of two who lives in an apartment block in the city, said virtually no heat was coming from the radia-

tors.

“We prepared two rooms for this emergency and installed electric fireplaces there for heating, since they promised not to disconnect us from the electricity,” she told Reuters.

“So we will hold on like this, hoping that this whole situation with gas is temporary.”

## Two killed in Russian drone strike on Kyiv

In other regional news, Russia launched a New Year’s Day drone strike on the Ukrainian capital Kyiv early on Wednesday, killing two people, wounding at least six others and damaging buildings, authorities said.

Explosions boomed across the morning sky as Ukraine’s air force warned of incoming drones and Mayor Vitali Klitschko said air defenses were repelling an enemy attack.

Two floors of a residential building in central Kyiv were partially destroyed in the strike, according to the State Emergency Service. Two people were killed, it said.

Photos posted by the agency showed firefighters dousing a gutted corner of a building and rescuers helping elderly victims.

The National Bank of Ukraine said in a statement that one of its buildings nearby had been damaged by debris from a downed drone. Debris also damaged a non-residential building in a different neighborhood, authorities said.

Kyiv’s military said it had shot down 63 out of 111 drones launched by Russia overnight across various regions of Ukraine. Another 46 had been downed by electronic jamming, it added.

## IN BRIEF

### At least 10 dead in shooting incident in Montenegro

A gunman in Montenegro who was still at large killed at least 10 people on Wednesday, including two children, police said.

Police director Lazar Scepanovic told a news conference that the suspect killed four people in a restaurant in the town of Cetinje. The gunman then moved to three other locations, killing more people, including two children. The suspect had been drinking heavily for most of the day, he said.

“This person is in the Cetinje area. The perimeter is narrowed. ... We will do everything to put this person under control and apprehend him,” Scepanovic said.

In a live TV broadcast from outside a medical centre, Montenegrin Prime Minister Milojko Spajic called the incident a “terrible tragedy” and declared three days of national mourning.

He said four people had been transferred to a hospital in Podgorica, the capital, for surgery.

Montenegro’s president, Jakov Milatovic, also reacted to the attack. “I am stunned and horrified with the tragedy in Cetinje. ... We are praying and hoping for the recovery of the wounded,” Milatovic said in a statement.

Cetinje was eerily quiet and snow-covered streets were empty except for law enforcement on Wednesday. Special police and anti-terrorist units searching for the suspect fanned out to hills. Cetinje sits in a shallow valley surrounded by rugged mountains.

Montenegro police sent special units to the area and urged people to remain inside their homes.

### At least 20 migrants missing as boat sinks off Italy; 7 rescued

Seven migrants were rescued, but at least 20 are missing after their boat sank en route to Italy from Libya, the mayor of the Italian island of Lampedusa said on Wednesday.

Among those saved was an 8-year-old Syrian boy, hoping to join his father who lives in Germany. He was accompanied by his mother on the perilous trip, but she has not been seen since the boat sank on Tuesday.

Survivors, who were brought to Lampedusa, said the missing included five women and three children.

“They didn’t make it to shore. Knowing that these poor souls were so close, but couldn’t make it is even more heartbreaking,” said mayor Filippo Mannino.

The small boat set sail from the Libyan town of Zuwara late on Monday but got into difficulty in the early hours of Tuesday and flipped over. No bodies have yet been retrieved.

The sea migration route between Africa and Europe is one of the most dangerous in the world, with almost 24,500 disappearing or dying in the central Mediterranean since 2014, according to the International Organization for Migration.

### Islamic State claims responsibility for attack on Somalia military base

The Islamic State group on Wednesday claimed responsibility for an attack on a military base in Somalia’s northeastern region of Puntland a day earlier, the group posted on its Telegram channel.

In its statement, Islamic State said the attack was conducted by 12 militants and two booby-trapped vehicles, adding that it killed around 22 military personnel from the Puntland forces and injured dozens of others.

Somali authorities could not immediately be reached for comment.

On Tuesday, security forces in Somalia said they had repulsed an attack by Islamic State suicide bombers on a military base in Puntland, according to the local state broadcaster and a military official.

Captain Yusuf Mohamed, an officer in Puntland’s counter-terrorism forces, told Reuters on Tuesday that nine suicide bombers had been killed and several soldiers had been injured, near the town of Dharjaale in the Bari region.

The group was officially recognized as the Somali province of Islamic State in 2017 and has been based in the mountainous areas of Puntland. For many years, it was considered a minor security threat in the Horn of Africa country.

In recent years, however, the Somali franchise has refashioned itself as an important part of the jihadist group’s worldwide network, with its head, Abdulqadir Mumin, being named its global leader by some media outlets.

Security analysts say Islamic State in Somalia has grown in strength because of an influx of foreign fighters.

REUTERS

## Habitat

Continued from Page 1NN

replaced it last month.”

As she thumbed through scrap books full of photos and newspaper clippings of the construction of her home, Hollis pondered Carter’s legacy.

“It would be the grace of God if we can find another human like Jimmy Carter,” Hollis said.

“The man he had love, he cared for people. And in this world, you got to know love. You got to have love ... we are all sisters and brothers. And that’s what a lot of people don’t understand.”

The Carters worked alongside Hollis and other volunteers to complete her entire home in a week.

They shared meals together and built friendships as they hammered and sawed. For Hollis, the experience wasn’t just about a house, it was about getting to know the love and humanity of Carter.

“If it weren’t for Jimmy Carter, I’d still be going from apartment to apartment. He put me in this house, and I’m planning on staying here until they take me out,” Hollis said. “I thank him for it. I really do. I love him for it.”

## South Korea

Continued from Page 1NN

aircraft maker Boeing.

“They’re also planning to start a visual investigation into the wreckage,” deputy minister for civil aviation Joo Jong-wan told a briefing.

Officials have said investigators were expected to examine whether a bird strike, a failure of the landing gear to drop or if problems with any other control systems played a role in the disaster.

They will also investigate the pilot’s apparent rush to attempt a landing right after he had declared an emergency, officials have said.

Air safety experts have also questioned if the airport embankment designed to prop up navigation equipment was built too close to the end of the runway.

South Korea’s acting President Choi Sang-mok on Wednesday called for a fair and objective investigation, and said funeral procedures have begun after all the victims were formally identified.

“The most urgent matter at present is to return the victims to their fam-

ilies,” Choi told an intra-agency meeting.

Airport authorities set up an altar late on Tuesday, and on Wednesday buses carried relatives of victims to the crash site so that they could pay their respects, near the crashed plane’s charred and broken tail – the only relatively intact part of the aircraft following the accident.

The Muan airport was brimming with mourners seeking to pay their tributes at the altar, leading to a line several hundred yards long.

Park Han-shin, who has been liaising with airport and government authorities on behalf of the bereaved families, said on Wednesday that almost 700 family members visited the crash site, where they laid chrysanthemums and bowls of rice cake soup.

Park also added there was a list of 43 bodies ready to be released, asking relatives of those not on the list for patience.

County officials sent an alert to urge visitors to go instead to a larger memorial set up in a sport complex about 5 miles from the crash site.

It could still take several days until all bereaved relatives are able to secure the release of the bodies of their loved ones.



# Attack adds to list of similar crashes

David Shepardson and Chris Sanders  
REUTERS

A new chapter in mass attacks began in Nice, France, in 2016, when a man drove a heavy truck into crowds of Bastille Day celebrants. Since then vehicle attacks have become increasingly common, though only some have been declared acts of terrorism. The New Year’s Day attack in New Orleans, as revelers ushered in 2025, was the latest attack.

A driver crashed his pickup truck into a crowd celebrating New Year’s Day in New Orleans’ French Quarter and opened fire, killing at least 10 people and injuring more than 35, in an early morning attack the FBI said was a potential act of terrorism.

Vehicle attacks have become increasingly common around the world. The U.S. Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency calls vehicle attacks “a significant threat in the United States” and provides a “Vehicle Incident Prevention and Mitigation Security Guide.”

Below is a list in reverse chronological order of some high-profile incidents in which a vehicle was used to ram into crowds.

**Magdeburg, Germany:** Last month in Germany, a 50-year-old man was charged with multiple counts of murder and attempted murder after police said he plowed a car through crowds at a Christmas market in Magdeburg, killing five people and injuring scores. The suspect, who was in custody, is a psychiatrist from Saudi Arabia with a history of anti-Islamic rhetoric who has lived in Germany for almost two decades.

**Zhuhai, China:** A driver in November rammed his car into a crowd at a sports



A banner is carried in remembrance of the 2021 Waukesha Christmas Parade victims, survivors, families and first responders, during the 61st annual Waukesha Christmas Parade in Wisconsin on Dec. 8. SCOTT ASH/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

center in the southern Chinese city of Zhuhai, killing 35 people and severely injuring 43 in one of the deadliest attacks in contemporary Chinese history. Police said the 62-year-old driver, with the surname Fan, had been captured and hospitalized for wounds believed to have been self-inflicted with a knife to the neck and other parts of his body. Fan had been upset about the split of assets in his divorce settlement, police said.

**Waukesha, Wisconsin:** A Wisconsin man was convicted in 2022 of killing six people and injuring dozens when he drove his SUV into a Christmas parade near Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in November 2021. Darrell Brooks was accused of deliberately driving his sport utility vehicle through police barricades and plowing into crowds of people participating in the annual parade in Waukesha, about 15 miles west of downtown Milwaukee.

**London, Ontario:** A 22-year-old self-confessed Canadian white nationalist ran over and killed four members of a Muslim family with his pick-up truck in June 2021 in London, Ontario, a Canadian city about 120 miles from Toronto. In 2023, Nathaniel Veltman was convicted

of first-degree murder. The judge in the case called it an act of terrorism.

**Toronto:** In 2018, a man plowed a rented van into dozens of people in downtown Toronto, killing 11 people and injuring 15. Alek Minassian was found guilty in 2021 of murdering 10 people and attempting to murder 16. One of the 16 later died in connection with injuries suffered in the attack, and a judge said she considered the woman the 11th murder victim.

**New York:** In October 2017, a 34-year-old Uzbek national plowed a rented truck onto a Manhattan bike path, killing eight people and injuring 11, including a Belgian woman who lost her legs. Sayfullo Saipov, who had moved to the United States in 2010, was convicted in 2023 of murder with a goal of joining Islamic State, which the United States designates a terrorist organization.

**Barcelona:** In August 2017, a 22-year-old man rammed a car into crowds in Barcelona on Las Ramblas, a popular tourist spot, killing 13 people. The man, Younes Abouyaaqoub, fled the scene on foot before later stabbing a man to death and taking his car to escape. Abouyaaqoub was shot dead by police a few days

later near Barcelona.

**New York:** In May 2017, a U.S. Navy veteran rammed his car into pedestrians in Manhattan’s crowded Times Square, killing a woman and injuring 22 people. A jury in 2022 accepted the insanity defense offered by Richard Rojas.

**London:** In March 2017, a car sped across Westminster Bridge, mowing down pedestrians just outside Parliament, killing four people and injuring dozens. The driver, 52-year-old Khalid Masood, a British-born convert to Islam, then fatally stabbed a police officer before he was shot dead.

**Berlin:** In December 2016, Anis Amri, a failed Tunisian asylum seeker with Islamist links, hijacked a truck, killed the driver and then plowed it into a crowded Berlin Christmas market, killing 11 more people and injuring dozens. Four days later he was killed in a shoot-out with police in Italy.

**Nice, France:** In 2016, a gunman drove a heavy truck into a crowd celebrating Bastille Day in the coastal city of Nice, killing 86 people and injuring many more in an attack claimed by Islamic State. The attacker was identified as a Tunisian-born Frenchman.

## New Orleans

Continued from Page 1NN

the assault happened, Cantrell said. The driver of the truck swerved around barricades on his way into the crowd, she said.

Cantrell said she and police superintendent Kirkpatrick visited the two police officers who were shot in the hospital. “Considering their injuries, they’re doing well,” the New Orleans mayor said.

Meanwhile, details are starting to emerge about the victims. Tiger Bech, a 28-year-old native of Lafayette, Louisiana, died as a result of his injuries in the driving attack, NOLA.com reported, citing the athletic director at St. Thomas More Catholic High School where Bech had played football.

A University of Georgia student was critically injured in the attack and “receiving medical treatment,” according to university President Jere Morehead.

“I have spoken to the student’s family and shared my concern, support and well wishes on behalf of the entire UGA community,” Morehead said Wednesday in a post on X.

### Sugar Bowl moves to Thursday

New Orleans was due to host the Notre Dame Fighting Irish and University of Georgia Bulldogs Wednesday night in the Sugar Bowl, but the college football playoff quarterfinals match was postponed 24 hours until Thursday at Caesars Superdome in New Orleans due to the attack.

“We live in the fun and games world with what we do, but we certainly recognize the importance of this, and we’re going to support it 100 percent,” Jeff Hundley, the CEO of the Sugar Bowl, said during Wednesday afternoon’s wide-ranging press conference.

The Sugar Bowl New Year’s parade took place Tuesday afternoon in the same area as the crash.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry said he mobilized about 100 members of the National Guard in a military police unit to help protect New Orleans and the Sugar Bowl while the investigation of the attack continues.

“It is important for our citizens and guests of the state to know that we’re doing everything that we can to secure their safety and the city,” Landry said.



Police attend the scene where a pickup truck drove into a large crowd early Wednesday on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, seen in this screengrab taken from a video. ABC AFFILIATE WGNO VIA REUTERS

“The Superdome and the surrounding area is safe.”

Landry said he planned to attend the Sugar Bowl college football game to demonstrate it is safe.

“I’ll tell you one thing: Your governor is going to be there,” Landry said. “That is proof, believe you me, that the facility and the city is safer than it was yesterday.”

### Governor declares state of emergency

Landry said he had expected to issue an emergency declaration Thursday to coordinate local, state and federal authorities for Super Bowl LIX on Feb. 9 and for Mardi Gras, which is scheduled to begin on Monday.

The Louisiana governor added that he moved up the declaration to Wednesday because of the attack.

Meanwhile, New Orleans police said they’ll be ready for upcoming events. The department is deploying resources at a level like other recent major events, such as the Taylor Swift concert. NOPD will work alongside local, state and federal partners to provide extensive security coverage across the city.

“Residents and visitors can expect to see a strong presence of marked and unmarked police vehicles, as well as officers on foot, bike, and horseback as part of the department’s Mounted Patrol,” Kirkpatrick said. “This increased visi-

bility will enhance public safety, provide crowd control, and allow for rapid response to any incidents.”

### Biden briefed on attack; Trump responds

President Joe Biden, who was traveling to Camp David in Maryland on Wednesday, issued a statement noting that he is being continually briefed by federal law enforcement leadership and Department of Homeland Security.

Biden added that the attack was being investigated as an “act of terrorism.”

“I am grateful for the brave and swift response of local law enforcement in preventing even greater death and injury,” the president said in the statement. “I have directed my team to ensure every resource is available as federal, state, and local law enforcement work assiduously to get to the bottom of what happened as quickly as possible and to ensure that there is no remaining threat of any kind.”

The FBI, Justice Department’s National Security Division, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and federal prosecutors in Louisiana are working with state and local law enforcement in response to the attack, Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement.

President-elect Donald Trump, on his Truth Social platform, called the attack “pure evil.”

“When I said that the criminals coming in are far worse than the criminals we have in our country, that statement was constantly refuted by Democrats and the Fake News Media, but it turned out to be true,” Trump said. “The crime rate in our country is at a level that nobody has ever seen before. Our hearts are with all of the innocent victims and their loved ones, including the brave officers of the New Orleans Police Department. The Trump Administration will fully support the City of New Orleans as they investigate and recover from this act of pure evil!”

### Explosion in Las Vegas

One person is dead and seven others were hurt after a Tesla Cybertruck caught fire and exploded near the covered entrance of Trump International Hotel Las Vegas Wednesday morning.

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sheriff Kevin McMahon said a person inside the EV died and seven people sustained minor injuries.

“There does not appear to be any further threat to our community here now,” McMahon said during a news conference.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk said Wednesday in a post on X that the fire in the Cybertruck is being investigated by “the whole Tesla senior team.”

### DC security heightened

The Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C., heightened its security Wednesday across the city out of an abundance caution, although there is no known threat to the city, according to Paris Lewbel, deputy director of communications for the department.

High-profile events that could attract crowds to the city in the near future include the convening of the new Congress on Friday, the counting of Electoral College votes on Monday, former President Jimmy Carter’s funeral proceedings Tuesday through Thursday and President-elect Donald Trump’s inauguration on Jan. 20.

“As we approach upcoming major events in the District of Columbia, MPD will continue working with our local and federal partners to assess potential threats and make any necessary adjustments to safeguard the community,” Lewbel said.

*Contributing: Eve Chen and Bailey Schulz; Reuters*



# SPORTS **EXTRA**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF



Texas' Gunnar Helm celebrates after scoring a touchdown during the second overtime against Arizona State on Wednesday in the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. TODD KIRKLAND/GETTY IMAGES



Ohio State quarterback Will Howard celebrates a first-quarter touchdown against Oregon during the Rose Bowl on Wednesday in Pasadena, Calif. RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES

# UPSET SPECIALS

## No. 5 Texas recovers after blowing big lead to beat No. 4 Arizona State

Jack Batten | FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

ATLANTA – Quinn Ewers threw a go-ahead 25-yard touchdown to Gunnar Helm, helping No. 5 Texas beat No. 4 Arizona State 39-31 in double overtime on Wednesday in a College Football Playoff quarter-final game at the Peach Bowl.

Texas' Andrew Mukuba intercepted Sam Leavitt on the ensuing possession, clinching the win for Texas (13-2), which squandered a 16-point fourth-quarter lead. Ewers completed 20 of 30 passes for 322 yards, three touchdowns and an interception. Matthew Golden caught seven passes for 149 yards and a score.

The victory advances Texas into the semifinals against No. 8 Ohio State, which blasted No. 1 Oregon 41-21 in the Rose Bowl on Wednesday. The Longhorns and Buckeyes (12-2) will play in the Cotton Bowl

See PEACH BOWL, Page 3NS

### Inside

**Sugar Bowl postponed:** The game between Georgia and Notre Dame has been postponed until Thursday following the deadly truck attack in New Orleans' French Quarter. **Story, 3NS**

**Gator Bowl:** No. 14 Ole Miss and Duke both have something to prove Thursday night in Jacksonville, Fla. **Preview, 2NS**

## No. 8 Ohio State knocks out top-seeded Oregon in Rose Bowl

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Ohio State quarterback Will Howard was distraught in the aftermath of the Buckeyes' 32-31 loss at Oregon on Oct. 12.

Howard made a mental mistake by sliding to the turf as time ran out, preventing a possible game-winning field-goal attempt.

All he could think about was getting another opportunity to play the Ducks.

Howard received his second chance and his No. 8 seed Buckeyes were more than ready on Wednesday. Ohio State scored the game's first 34 points and delivered a convincing 41-21 victory over No. 1 seed Oregon on Wednesday in a College Football Playoff quarterfinal at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif.

Howard passed for 319 yards and three touchdowns to put those

See ROSE BOWL, Page 3NS

GOLF PGA TOUR

## Sentry opens season with notable absence

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Will Scottie Scheffler continue his extended run of excellence into 2025?

The answer to that question will have to be put on hold.

The 2025 PGA Tour season begins Thursday at the Plantation Course at Kapalua, Hawaii, as 60 players tee off at The Sentry. The field is reserved for the top 50 players from last year's FedEx Cup race plus anyone who won a tournament throughout the year.

World No. 1 Scheffler undoubtedly qualifies under those criteria, but according to a statement from his manager, he suffered a puncture wound from a broken glass while cooking Christmas Day dinner. He needed surgery to remove fragments of the glass from the palm of his right hand.

Scheffler withdrew from The Sentry

and is questionable for The American Express in two weeks' time.

"It's a huge bummer. I hope he's OK," Xander Schauffele said Tuesday. "... I didn't feel, like, too comfortable texting him. It's weird, because we're competitors, but at the same time he's such a nice guy, him and (his wife Meredith). I just hope he's fine. We're a lot better off with him here in Hawaii than not, so hopefully he gets a full recovery and he's fine."

Schauffele, the World No. 2, will be the main attraction in Hawaii with Northern Ireland star Rory McIlroy also opting to skip the event.

Schauffele is coming off a breakthrough season that saw him win his first two majors, the PGA Championship and the Open Championship.

See SENTRY, Page 6NS



World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler, shown at the Tour Championship on Sept. 1, won't play in The Sentry after suffering a hand injury. JOHN DAVID MERCER/USA TODAY SPORTS



FOOTBALL

NFL NOTEBOOK

Record chase over: Eagles to rest Barkley

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Pro Football Hall of Famer Eric Dickerson will remain the NFL’s single-season rushing leader for at least one more year.

With the Philadelphia Eagles’ post-season secured, head coach Nick Sirianni told reporters on Wednesday that the team is “gonna rest some guys” in what proves to be a meaningless season finale against the visiting New York Giants. Chiefly among that group is star running back Saquon Barkley, who needed 101 yards to break Dickerson’s hallowed mark of 2,105 yards set with the Los Angeles Rams during a 16-game season in 1984.

Health, however, remains the top priority for the Eagles (13-3), who are locked into the No. 2 seed in the NFC heading into their finale versus the Giants (3-13).

“It’s a very special record that’s been standing for a very long time by a great player,” Sirianni said. “But you try to do what’s best for the team. Our goals are to have success and play good the next game we play.”

Barkley has rushed for at least 101 yards in 11 games this season, including Sunday’s 41-7 rout of the Dallas Cowboys when his 167 yards made him the ninth player in NFL history to reach 2,000.

On Sunday, Barkley told reporters that he will abide by Sirianni’s decision with respect to the season finale against his former team.

Chiefs to rest QB Mahomes; Wentz to start

The Kansas City Chiefs will rest quarterback Patrick Mahomes and other starters in Sunday’s regular-season finale against the host Denver Broncos.

The Chiefs (15-1) have locked up the No. 1 seed in the AFC and head coach Andy Reid confirmed that veteran Carson Wentz will be under center Sunday.

Wentz, 32, has played a total of nine snaps in two games this season, his first with Kansas City. He completed both of



Eagles running back Saquon Barkley (26) runs past Dallas Cowboys safety Juanyle Thomas on Sunday in Philadelphia. BILL STREICHER/IMAGN IMAGES

his pass attempts for 20 yards with no touchdowns or interceptions.

Drafted No. 2 overall by Philadelphia in 2016, Wentz is 47-45-1 as a starter with the Eagles (2016-20), Indianapolis Colts (2021), Washington Commanders (2022), Los Angeles Rams (2023) and Chiefs.

Rams to rest QB Stafford; Garoppolo gets start

The Los Angeles Rams are resting quarterback Matthew Stafford and will start Jimmy Garoppolo for the regular-season finale on Sunday against the visiting Seattle Seahawks.

Rams coach Sean McVay made the announcement Wednesday after giving an indication Monday that he planned to rest most of the team’s key starters.

The Rams (10-6) have won the NFC West by virtue of a tiebreaker should they lose to the second-place Seahawks (9-7). Los Angeles will be at home for the wild-card round, either as a fourth or

third seed in the NFC playoffs.

49ers QB Dobbs to start for Purdy (elbow) vs. Cardinals

San Francisco will start Joshua Dobbs in place of injured quarterback Brock Purdy when the 49ers end their season on Sunday at the Arizona Cardinals.

49ers coach Kyle Shanahan announced that Dobbs will replace Purdy, who suffered a right elbow contusion with nerve inflammation in Monday night’s loss to the Detroit Lions.

Shanahan said both Dobbs and fellow quarterback Brandon Allen are ready to play.

“They’ve been two good guys to have there,” Shanahan said. “Kind of looked at both of them as our two throughout the year, but they’ve both given really good looks on scout team. They split all the reps there. They’re always ready. They both prepare like they’re going to be the starter every week. They’ve been

great.”

San Francisco (6-10) is thin on the offensive line, so Dobbs’ mobility gave him the edge to start, Shanahan confirmed.

Colts QB Richardson (back) hopes to play in finale

Indianapolis quarterback Anthony Richardson said he has been dealing with the most severe back spasms of his life, but he still wants to play Sunday when the Colts host the Jacksonville Jaguars to end their season.

Richardson, 22, missed practice last week and Sunday’s loss to the New York Giants which eliminated the Colts (7-9) from playoff contention.

“Last week was tough,” Richardson said Wednesday, when he didn’t participate in the team’s walkthrough. “I couldn’t even stand up on Tuesday, could barely even walk. ... But I’m here, I’m standing now. If I can do everything in my power to get on the field, I’m going to do so.”

Reports: Packers CB Alexander undergoes knee surgery

Green Bay Packers cornerback Jaire Alexander underwent knee surgery this week to alleviate pain and swelling, multiple outlets reported Wednesday.

Alexander, 27, first tore the PCL in his right knee on Oct. 27 and had played just 10 snaps of one game since. He could return for the Super Bowl, should the play-off-bound Packers advance, per an ESPN report. Alexander had the surgery on Tuesday.

The two-time Pro Bowler had 16 tackles, two interceptions and seven passes defended in seven starts this season.

He has 12 career interceptions in 78 games (76 starts) since being selected No. 18 overall by the Packers in the 2018 draft.

The Packers (11-5) end their regular season at home against the Chicago Bears on Sunday. The Packers need a win and a Washington loss to move up to the No. 6 seed.

GATOR BOWL PREVIEW

No. 14 Ole Miss has something to prove vs. Duke

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

There’s no shortage of motivation for No. 14 Ole Miss in the Gator Bowl.

The incentive for Duke might be a bit different, but the Blue Devils will be out to prove something as well Thursday night in Jacksonville, Fla.

Both teams hold 9-3 records but arrived at this point in different ways.

Ole Miss was a contender for a spot in the College Football Playoff, while Duke was under the radar for most of the season. It will be the first meeting between the teams.

“We have a chance to get 10 wins,” Ole Miss tight end Caden Prieskorn said. “... A lot of us know this is our last time really getting to throw an Ole Miss jersey on.”

Ole Miss appears to be fired up for this matchup. Quarterback Jaxson Dart, considered an NFL prospect, has thrown for 3,875 yards and 25 touchdowns. He will play in the game before focusing on draft preparation. Tre Harris had a team-high 1,030 receiving yards and seven touchdowns, though he could be limited by injuries.

Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin has made comments disparaging other conferences in connection to the CFP committee’s selections for the 12-team tournament. So he’s bound to be determined to make a point on behalf of the Southeastern Conference against an Atlantic Coast Conference team.

The Rebels are on board.

“Everybody on this team is just so bought-in on what the coaches and Kiffin has been able to do these last couple years,” receiver Jordan Watkins said.

Duke is looking to cap another strong season with one more statement result despite some potential roster holes.

“You play to win the game and play to try to maximize all your players’ strengths,” first-year Blue Devils coach Manny Diaz said. “You have to do what is necessary to try to move the ball against a highly, highly disruptive defense.”

Duke has been decimated by defections, particularly on offense. Quarterback Maalik Murphy entered the trans-



Mississippi’s Ulysses Bentley IV runs the ball against Mississippi State during the second half on Nov. 29 in Oxford, Miss. WES HALE/GETTY IMAGES

fer portal early in the process, while running back Star Thomas, who compiled a team-high 871 rushing yards, announced following Christmas that he was leaving. Murphy set the school’s single-season record with 26 touchdown passes.

The QB position for the bowl was further dinged because Grayson Loftis, who started several games late in the 2023 season, entered the portal as well. That leaves starting quarterback duties in the hands of Henry Belin IV.

“Henry is a guy who has won a game as a starter here a year ago,” Diaz said. “It’s a great lesson for everybody in the program that perseverance pays off, and he has a chance now to perform on an outstanding stage against a terrific op-

ponent.”

Diaz said it will be important “to get our timing down for the passing offense.”

Belin will have receiver Eli Pancol, who is wrapping up his college career. Pancol has a team-high nine touchdown receptions.

Duke’s defense will have to rely on cornerback Chandler Rivers, who has been tabbed for several postseason honors. He had three interceptions and caused two fumbles during the regular season.

Duke, which will make its first appearance in the Gator Bowl, ranks second in the country with 14 fumble recoveries and 9.2 tackles for loss per game.

Ole Miss’ opt-out list includes line-

backer Chris Paul and safety Jadon Canady. The Rebels defeated five bowl-eligible teams this year, while Duke topped four.

Duke and Ole Miss have a common opponent in Wake Forest, which was drubbed by Ole Miss in September. It was later revealed the Demon Deacons had pulled out of next season’s game at Ole Miss. That rankled Kiffin and might further fuel his motivation against an ACC foe. Duke rallied to win at Wake Forest in the regular-season finale on a TD pass as time expired.

Duke is 8-8 all-time in bowls, though the Blue Devils have a five-game bowl winning streak. The last four of those victories have come against opponents outside of power conferences.



COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

SUGAR BOWL NO. 7 NOTRE DAME VS. NO. 2 GEORGIA, 4 P.M. ET, ESPN

Game postponed until Thursday after attack

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

The Sugar Bowl between Georgia and Notre Dame has been postponed until Thursday following the deadly truck attack in New Orleans' French Quarter early Wednesday morning, Sugar Bowl CEO Jeff Hundley announced Wednesday afternoon.

"We have been in consultation with ESPN, with the College Football Playoff, with the Southeastern Conference, with the University of Georgia, with Notre Dame, all parties," Hundley said at a press conference. "And all agree that it's in the best interest of everybody and public safety that we postpone the game for 24 hours."

The FBI is investigating the incident as an act of terrorism. The postponement comes as law enforcement continues to comb the crime scene and secure the French Quarter.

A shelter in place was in effect for the Bulldogs at their team hotel, ESPN reported. At least one Georgia student suffered critical injuries in the attack and was receiving medical treatment, the school said.

Early Wednesday morning, a driver "hell-bent on creating the carnage and



Fans line up at the front desk of the Sheraton hotel in New Orleans after the Sugar Bowl between Georgia and Notre Dame was postponed after an attack on Bourbon Street early Wednesday morning. GEOFF BURKE/IMAGN IMAGES

damage that he did" drove his pickup at high speeds through the crowds on Bourbon Street, killing 15 people and injuring at least 35, police said. Law en-

forcement identified the suspect as Shamsud Din Jabbar, 42, a U.S. citizen from Texas. A flag of the terrorist group known as ISIS was recovered from the

suspect's vehicle, police said.

"It was very intentional behavior," Anne Kirkpatrick, the New Orleans Police superintendent, said. "This man was trying to run over as many people as he could."

Explosive devices were found on the scene, according to multiple reports, and New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell called the incident a "terrorist attack."

Authorities said the male suspect exited his truck with an assault rifle and opened fire on police officers before he was killed by return fire. At least two officers were shot and wounded, officials said.

"The Sugar Bowl Committee is devastated by the terrible events from early this morning. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families. We are in ongoing discussions with authorities on the local, state, and federal levels and will communicate further details as they become available," Hundley said in a statement earlier in the day.

Barring further delays, Thursday's CFP quarterfinal between the No. 2 seed Bulldogs (11-2) and No. 7 Fighting Irish (12-1) is now scheduled to kick off at 4 p.m. ET.

Peach Bowl

Continued from Page 1

on Jan. 10 in Arlington, Texas.

Cam Skattebo had 242 all-purpose yards, including 143 rushing, to go along with three total touchdowns for Arizona State (11-3).

After Skattebo rushed for a 3-yard touchdown on overtime's opening possession, Ewers connected with Golden for a game-tying 28-yard touchdown pass on fourth and 13.

Trailing by 14 at halftime, Arizona State took its opening drive of the second half to Texas' 2-yard line, where it was turned away on third and fourth downs, turning the ball over on downs for the third time.

Arizona State salvaged the opportunity on the ensuing play, as Shamari Simmons forced Quintrevion Wisner's fumble in the end zone, where it was recovered by Ewers for a safety, cutting Texas' lead to 17-5 with 6:51 left in the third quarter.

The Sun Devils cut into the deficit on their next possession with Carston Kieffer's 36-yard field goal with 41 seconds remaining in the third.

Texas then found the end zone for the first time since the first quarter, as its 13-play, 76-yard drive was stamped with Ewers' 5-yard touchdown rush with 10:17 left in the fourth quarter.

Arizona State pulled within one score on its next drive, as Skattebo's 42-yard touchdown pass to Malik McClain was followed by Leavitt's pass to Xavier Guillory on the two-point conversion with 6:31 left.

Ewers was then intercepted by Javan Robinson and Leavitt completed a 62-yard pass to Skattebo, setting up Skattebo's 2-yard rushing touchdown and game-tying two-point conversion with five minutes remaining.

Texas kicker Bert Auburn then missed field goals on consecutive Texas drives, including a 38-yarder as time expired.

Arizona State took a 3-0 lead on Kieffer's 39-yard field goal at the 8:59 mark of the first quarter. Ewers answered with a 23-yard touchdown pass to DeAndre Moore Jr. 45 seconds later.

Texas tacked on with Silas Bolden's 75-yard punt return touchdown, extending the Longhorns' lead to 14-3 with 7:08 remaining.

Texas added three points on Auburn's 22-yard field goal with 8:54 left in the second quarter. Kieffer's 36-yard field goal was blocked with 11 seconds left, preserving Texas' 17-3 halftime lead.

Texas 39, Arizona State 31, 2OT										
Texas	14	3	0	7	7	8	-	39		
Arizona State	3	0	5	16	7	0	-	31		
First Quarter										
ASU—Carston Kieffer 39 yd FG, 8:59.										
Tex—DeAndre Moore Jr. 23 yd pass from Quinn Ewers (Bert Auburn kick), 8:14.										
Tex—Silas Bolden 75 yd punt return (Bert Auburn kick), 7:08.										
Second Quarter										
Tex—Bert Auburn 22 yd FG, 8:54.										
Third Quarter										
ASU—Team safety, 7:38.										
ASU—Carston Kieffer 36 yd FG, 0:41.										
Fourth Quarter										
Tex—Quinn Ewers 5 yd run (Bert Auburn kick), 10:17.										
ASU—Malik McClain 42 yd pass from Cam Skattebo, 6:31.										
ASU—Xavier Guillory 2pt Pass from Sam Leavitt, 6:31.										
ASU—Cam Skattebo 2 yd run (Cam Skattebo 2pt Rush), 5:00.										
OT										
ASU—Cam Skattebo 3 yd run (Carston Kieffer kick), 0:00.										
Tex—Matthew Golden 28 yd pass from Quinn Ewers (Bert Auburn kick), 0:00.										
2OT										
Tex—Gunnar Helm 25 yd pass from Quinn Ewers, 0:00.										
Tex—Matthew Golden 2pt Pass from Quinn Ewers, 0:00.										
A-71,105										
	Tex			ASU						
First downs	17			29						
Total Net Yards	375			510						
Rushes-yards	30-53			49-214						
Passing	322			296						
Punt Returns	2-80			1-8						
Kickoff Returns	2-29			1-17						
Interceptions Ret.	1-0			1-0						
Comp-Att-Int	20-30-1			26-48-1						
Sacked-Yards Lost	3-15			3-9						
Punts	3-48.7			3-40.0						
Fumbles-Lost	1-0			0-0						
Penalties-Yards	10-67			6-50						
Time of Possession	22:06			37:54						



Texas quarterback Quinn Ewers holds up the trophy after a victory over Arizona State in the Peach Bowl on Wednesday in Atlanta. BRETT DAVIS/IMAGN IMAGES



Ohio State receiver Jeremiah Smith celebrates with the Leishman Trophy after defeating Oregon in the Rose Bowl on Wednesday. GARY A. VASQUEZ/IMAGN IMAGES

Rose Bowl

Continued from Page 1

pesky demons to rest.

"We came out and we played angry and it showed," said Howard, again expressing how badly he wanted redemption. "We jumped out to an early lead and it was hard for them to come back."

Offensive MVP Jeremiah Smith had two long touchdowns while catching seven passes for a career-high 187 yards, and TreVeyon Henderson rushed for 94 yards and two scores on eight carries as the Buckeyes (12-2) out-classed their Big Ten rival.

Ohio State will play No. 5 seed Texas (13-2) in the CFP semifinals on Jan. 10 in the Cotton Bowl at Arlington, Texas. The Longhorns beat Arizona State 39-31 in double overtime earlier Wednesday.

"We have two more (games). We're not done yet," Howard said. "We have unfinished business."

Dillon Gabriel completed 29 of 41 passes for 299 yards and two touchdowns for Oregon (13-1). Gabriel finished his career with 155 touchdown passes, tying Houston's Case Keenum (2007-II) for the all-time FBS record. Miami's Cam Ward set the Division I mark (FBS and FCS) of 158 last week.

Traeshon Holden caught seven passes for 116 yards and two touchdowns for the Ducks. Oregon star Jordan James was injured in the first half and sat out the second. He had 14 yards on seven rushes in the Ducks' first game since Dec. 7.

Oregon coach Dan Lanning didn't want to hear any chatter about the long layoff affecting his troops.

"That's an excuse," Lanning said. "I thought our guys prepared well going in. An opportunity that we had to recharge. I thought our guys did practice well. I thought they had a great focus. I just don't think our plan was good enough."

Howard completed 17 of 26 passes in the rematch as the Buckeyes outgained the Ducks 500-276.

The Buckeyes also routed No. 9 seed Tennessee 42-17 in their CFP opener on Dec. 21. They have won their two play-

off games by an average of 22.5 points.

"You can see the potential of where we're at," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said.

"We played with all three phases the way we did. I'm proud of the players and the resilience of these guys. We have a lot of football still ahead of us."

Ohio State harassed Gabriel throughout the contest and recorded eight sacks. Defensive MVP Cody Simon, Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau had two apiece.

"Anytime you get eight sacks, that's huge," Day said. "... I have a lot of respect for Oregon and the season they've had. We knew we had to be at our best today in order to win this game."

The Buckeyes scored their four first-half touchdowns on drives totaling nine plays.

Ohio State 41, Oregon 21

Ohio State	14	20	7	0	-	41
Oregon	0	8	7	6	-	21

First Quarter

OhioSt—Jeremiah Smith 45 yd pass from Will Howard (Jayden Fielding kick), 14:00.

OhioSt—Emeka Egbuka 42 yd pass from Will Howard (Jayden Fielding kick), 7:31.

Second Quarter

OhioSt—Jayden Fielding 46 yd FG, 14:50.

OhioSt—Jeremiah Smith 43 yd pass from Will Howard (Jayden Fielding kick), 10:28.

OhioSt—TreVeyon Henderson 66 yd run (Jayden Fielding kick), 8:47.

OhioSt—Jayden Fielding 36 yd FG, 2:59.

ORE—Traeshon Holden 5 yd pass from Dillon Gabriel, 0:00.

ORE—Justus Lowe 2pt Pass from Dillon Gabriel, 0:00.

Third Quarter

ORE—Noah Whittington 2 yd run (Atticus Sappington kick), 8:55.

OhioSt—TreVeyon Henderson 8 yd run (Jayden Fielding kick), 2:19.

Fourth Quarter

ORE—Traeshon Holden 27 yd pass from Dillon Gabriel (failed 2pt Rush), 10:00.

A-90,732

	OhioSt	ORE
First downs	20	15
Total Net Yards	500	276
Rushes-yards	31-181	28-23
Passing	319	299
Punt Returns	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns	1-3	0-0
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	17-26-0	29-42-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	0-0	8-56
Punts	5-40.4	8-39.9
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	2-14	3-13
Time of Possession	29:05	30:55

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—Ohio State, Henderson 8-94, Judkins 17-85, Smith 1-5, Howard 5-(minus 3), Oregon, James 7-14, Limar 2-41, Whittington 6-3, Johnson 1-(minus 1), Gabriel 12-(minus 43).

PASSING—Ohio State, Howard 17-26-0-319, Oregon, Gabriel 29-42-0-299, Moore 0-1-0-0.

RECEIVING—Ohio State, Smith 7-187, Egbuka 5-72, Henderson 3-20, Scott Jr 1-30, Tate 1-10, Oregon, Holden 7-116, Whittington 6-30, Ferguson 5-71, Johnson 5-32, Lowe 2-27, James 2-7, Sadiq 1-10, Bryant Jr 1-6.

MISSED FIELD GOALS—None.



COLLEGE BASKETBALL WOMEN’S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

# No. 1 UCLA puts away No. 24 Michigan

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Kiki Rice and Lauren Betts led five scorers in double digits as No. 1 UCLA stayed unbeaten by keeping No. 24 Michigan at arm’s length 86-70 in a Big Ten matchup on Wednesday in Los Angeles.

Rice posted 16 points on 6-of-8 shooting and added 10 assists and three steals. Betts followed with 13 points, 10 rebounds, five assists, four blocks and two steals as the Bruins (14-0, 3-0 Big Ten) used a 9-0 run midway through the fourth quarter to push their lead to 16. Another 9-0 run a few minutes later sealed the win.

Londynn Jones tallied 13 points and Gabriel Jaquez and Angela Dugalic 12 apiece for UCLA, which shot 55.6 percent from the field.

Freshman Sylva Swords scored a career-high 30 points on 11-of-25 shooting for Michigan (10-4, 1-2), which has lost three of its last four games. Olivia Olson contributed 17 points, six rebounds, three steals and two blocks, and Jordan Hobbs chipped in 10 points.



UCLA’s Kiki Rice (1) drives to the basket against Michigan’s Olivia Olson on Wednesday in Los Angeles. MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES

No. 4 USC 75, Nebraska 55

JuJu Watkins poured in 26 points, 11 in the third quarter, as the Trojans pulled away to defeat the Cornhuskers in the Big Ten contest in Los Angeles.

Watkins, who began the day third in Division I by averaging 25.2 points per game, went 7 of 15 from the field and 11 of 12 from the free-throw line. She made 9 of 10 from the line in the third quarter, as USC (13-1, 3-0 Big Ten) outscored Nebraska 20-11 to extend its lead to double digits.

Kiki Iriaften added 14 points, and Rayah Marshall chipped in eight points, nine rebounds, three blocks and two steals for USC, which extended its winning streak to nine games.

Logan Nissley led the Cornhuskers (10-4, 1-2) with 14 points, and teammate Britt Prince followed with 10 points, eight rebounds and four assists.

No. 7 UConn 77, Marquette 45

Sarah Strong led four scorers in double digits with 15 points, and the Hus-

kies used a strong second quarter to defeat the host Golden Eagles in a Big East game in Milwaukee.

KK Arnold added 13 points and seven assists off the bench for UConn (12-2, 3-0 Big East). Paige Bueckers entered averaging 20.9 points per game but managed just 12 against Marquette on 4-of-12 shooting. Jana EL Alfychipped in 10 points, and Strong added seven rebounds and four assists.

Skylar Forbes netted 20 points on 6-of-12 shooting for the Golden Eagles (9-4, 1-1). None of her teammates managed more than six points, and they combined to shoot 26.2 percent from the field. UConn’s Kaitlyn Chen tallied all seven of her points in the second quarter, as the Huskies outscored the Golden Eagles 21-8 to take control of the game.

No. 11 TCU 63, Colorado 50

Sedona Price amassed 14 points, 10

rebounds, four steals and three blocked shots while leading the Horned Frogs past the Buffaloes in Fort Worth, Texas.

Hailey Van Lith also scored 14 points for TCU (14-1, 2-0 Big 12), which won its fifth game in a row. The Horned Frogs outscored Colorado 39-26 in the middle two quarters to build a comfortable lead, and the Buffaloes never made it a one-possession game again.

Jade Masogayo paced Colorado (10-3, 1-1) with 14 points and six rebounds. Ayianna Johnson and Kennedy Sanders each scored eight points as the Buffaloes’ four-game winning streak ended.

No. 12 Kansas St. 74, Houston 55

The Wildcats saw a double-digit lead slip away in the third quarter but roared back in the fourth to put away the host Cougars for their ninth consecutive victory in the Big 12 clash.

Ayoka Lee, Temira Poindexter and Jaelyn Glenn all scored 15 points for Kansas State (14-1, 2-0 Big 12), with Lee adding nine rebounds and four blocks. Teammate Serena Sundell chipped in with 11 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists.

Trailing by one point with one minute gone in the fourth quarter, the Wildcats ran off 21 points to blow the game open. Poindexter had eight points in that spurt.

Eylia Love led Houston (4-9, 0-2) with 16 points and Laila Blair added 12 points and three steals.

No. 18 West Virginia 80, UCF 58

Ja’Naiya Quinerly scored 17 of her season-high 31 points in the first quarter as the Mountaineers built a big lead and coasted past the Big 12 opponent Knights in Morgantown, W.Va.

Sydney Shaw added 19 points and Jordan Harrison contributed 12 points, six rebounds and six assists for West Virginia (11-2, 1-1 Big 12). The Mountaineers led by six midway through the first quarter, but finished on a 17-1 burst, with Quinerly scoring eight and Harrison four.

Khyala Ngodu paced UCF with 14 points and seven rebounds. Kaitlin Peterson was right behind with 13 points,

Nevaeh Brown added 12 and Emely Rodriguez 11. The Knights (7-5, 0-2) lost their third straight game.

No. 21 Michigan St. 77, Purdue 59

Jocelyn Tate posted a season-high 19 points and added 11 rebounds and three steals, and she led a big second quarter as the Spartans turned back the Boiler-makers in East Lansing, Mich.

Grace VanSlooten finished with 13 points, six rebounds, four assists, three blocks and two steals for Michigan State (12-2, 2-1 Big 10), which ended a two-game losing streak. Ines Sotelo added 16 points and six boards, and Julia Ayrault supplied 11 points, 10 rebounds, two blocks and two steals.

Tate netted 10 points in the second quarter as Michigan State (12-2, 2-1 Big 10) outscored Purdue 18-3.

Destini Lombard and Lana McCarthy scored 10 points apiece to pace Purdue (7-7, 0-3), which has lost two games in a row and four of six. Lombard also had four steals and two blocks.

No. 23 Iowa 80, Penn State 68

Taylor McCabe scored 17 points, Addison O’Grady netted 16 and Hannah Stuelke posted a double-double as the Hawkeyes used a late 9-0 run to defeat the Lady Lions in the Big Ten matchup in University Park, Pa.

Stuelke finished with 13 points, 10 rebounds and four assists as Iowa (12-2, 2-1 Big Ten) won its third straight game. The Hawkeyes shot 52.5 percent from the floor and dominated in bench points (33-10) and paint points (46-26).

Gabby Elliott led Penn State with career highs of 32 points and seven 3-pointers, including two treys early in the fourth quarter as the Lady Lions (9-5, 0-3) were within 63-61 with 7:04 left. A layup by O’Grady and Teagan Mallegni’s three-point play began Iowa’s burst, which pushed the lead to 11 with 4:12 to play.

Lucy Olsen added 11 points for the Hawkeyes, and Gracie Merkle notched 13 points and 12 rebounds for the Lady Lions.

Elliott was 12 of 22 from the field, including 7 of 11 from deep.

NHL KINGS 3, DEVILS 0



Kings goaltender Darcy Kuemper, shown Saturday against the Edmonton Oilers, shut out the New Jersey Devils on Wednesday. GARY A. VASQUEZ/IMAGN IMAGES

# Kuemper serves up shutout for the Kings

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Darcy Kuemper made 33 saves for the Los Angeles Kings in a 3-0 win against the visiting New Jersey Devils on Wednesday afternoon.

Kuemper earned his second shutout of the season and 33rd of his NHL career, moving him into sole possession of 12th place among active NHL goalies.

Andre Lee scored his first NHL goal and Quinton Byfield and Adrian Kempe also scored for the Kings, who have won three in a row and eight straight at home.

Jake Allen made 21 saves for the Devils, who have lost three straight in regulation for the first time this season.

New Jersey was coming off a 3-2 loss at the Anaheim Ducks on Tuesday evening.

The Kings allowed a season-high 15 shots in the first period while taking nine of their own, but neither team could hit the net.

Playing in his 19th NHL game, Lee received a lofted pass from Jordan Spence and held off Devils defenseman

Brett Pesce while driving to the net. Lee lifted the puck as he neared the crease and banked it off the crossbar to give the Kings a 1-0 lead at 6:23 of the second.

Timo Meier appeared to score with a spinning shot from the slot to tie it 1-1 with 7:54 remaining in the second, but the Kings challenged for goalie interference on Devils forward Stefan Noesen and the goal was overturned following a review.

The Kings limited the Devils to six shots in the second period, but managed just three of their own.

L.A. Kings 3, New Jersey 0				
New Jersey	0	0	0	0
L.A. Kings	0	1	2	3
<b>First Period</b> —None. Penalties—Cotter, NJD (Hooking), 8:01. Kopitar, LAK (Holding), 12:01.				
<b>Second Period</b> —1. L.A. Kings, Lee 1 (Spence, Moverare), 6:23. Penalties—Bastian, NJD (Cross-checking), 7:03. Danault, LAK (Hooking), 16:29.				
<b>Third Period</b> —1. L.A. Kings, Byfield 9 (Danault, Anderson), 11:01. 1. L.A. Kings, Kempe 18 (Foegele, Anderson), 15:35. Penalties—Turcotte, LAK (Tripping), 3:24. Cotter, NJD (Roughing), 8:01. Byfield, LAK (Tripping), 8:45. Turcotte, LAK (High-sticking), 17:23.				
<b>Shots on Goal</b> —New Jersey 14-6-13-33. L.A. Kings 8-4-12-24.				
<b>Power-play opportunities</b> —New Jersey 0 of 6; L.A. Kings 0 of 3.				
<b>Goalies</b> —New Jersey, Allen 5-7-1 (23 shots-21 saves). L.A. Kings, Kuemper 10-2-5 (33-33). A-18,145 (18,230).				

MEN’S TOP 25 NO. 11 UCONN 81, DEPAUL 68

# Ball sinks 7 3-pointers as Huskies coast to win

REUTERS

Solo Ball swished a career-best seven 3-pointers en route to 22 points, and Alex Karaban had 18 points and seven rebounds to boost No. 11 UConn to an 81-68 win against host DePaul on Wednesday in Chicago.

Samson Johnson scored 10 points and Hassan Diarra dished nine assists for the Huskies, who shot 48.4 percent compared to 39.6 percent for the Blue Demons.

Conor Enright contributed 18 points and nine assists for DePaul, while Jacob Meyer (12 points) and N.J. Benson (10) also finished in double figures.

UConn (11-3, 3-0 Big East) maintained a stranglehold in its series against DePaul (9-5, 0-3). The Huskies improved to 20-1 against the Blue Demons, whose lone victory over UConn came on Jan. 31, 2007.

DePaul’s Big East regular season losing streak stretched to 35 games.

DePaul trailed by as many as 22 points and never led but capitalized on a Huskies shooting swoon midway through the second half as UConn adjusted to a right ankle sprain that took

starter Liam McNeeley (nine points, six rebounds) out of the game.

A 7-0 Blue Demons run, fueled by attacking the basket and getting to the free throw line, closed the gap to 61-52 with 7:58 to go.

But the Huskies responded with a trio of 3-pointers over a 50-second span. Karaban delivered UConn’s first field goal in more than five minutes when he connected at the 7:04 mark and bookended the spurt with a trey with 6:14 to go.

DePaul surrendered the first five points of the afternoon and eight of the first 10 after the Huskies and Blue Demons traded missed 3-pointers on their opening possessions.

Smooth offensive execution boosted the Huskies over the first 20 minutes, as they shot 48.6 percent from the field, including 53.3 percent from deep, to take a 43-22 lead into intermission.

Ball connected on 4 of 5 attempts from long range in the first half and was 7 of 9 for the game. He drilled a trey just before the buzzer on a feed from Diarra to cap a 6-0 run.

The Blue Demons shot just 26.9 percent in the first half.



Connecticut’s Solo Ball (1) shoots the ball during the first half of Wednesday’s game against DePaul in Chicago. GEOFF STELLFOX/GETTY IMAGES



NBA

WEDNESDAY’S ROUNDUP

Hart sends sizzling Knicks past Jazz

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Josh Hart posted his second straight triple-double and Karl-Anthony Towns finished with at least 30 points and 10 rebounds for the third consecutive game Wednesday night as the undermanned New York Knicks pulled away from the visiting Utah Jazz in a 119-103 victory.

The Knicks extended their winning streak to nine games despite the absence of star point guard Jalen Brunson (calf), who missed a game for the first time this season, and backup guard Miles McBride, who was slated to start for Brunson before he was scratched due to a tight left hamstring.

Hart didn’t score until the final seconds of the first half yet still finished with 15 points, 14 rebounds and 12 assists. Towns had 31 points and 21 rebounds as he became just the third Knicks player in team history – joining Hall of Famers Bob McAdoo and Patrick Ewing – to record at least 30 points and 10 rebounds in three consecutive games.

New York’s Mikal Bridges finished with 27 points while OG Anunoby had 22 points. Precious Achiuwa scored 12 points off the bench and put the Knicks ahead for good at 26-25 when he opened the second quarter with a dunk.

Rookie Tyler Kolek, who produced 36 points and 11 assists while playing almost 40 minutes earlier Wednesday for the G-League Westchester Knicks earlier Wednesday, added two points and four assists in 12-plus minutes for the parent club after being pressed into duty by the injuries to Brunson and McBride.

Nuggets 139, Hawks 120

Nikola Jokic had 23 points, 17 rebounds and 15 assists for his 14th triple-double of the season and third in four games, and host Denver beat Atlanta.

The 15 assists were one shy of his season high of 16, which he has done twice.

Russell Westbrook had 16 points and 11 assists and Michael Porter Jr. and Jamal Murray contributed 21 points each for the Nuggets, who have topped 130 points in four straight games.

Denver, which had a season-high 44 assists, swept the two games of the season series. The Nuggets won 141-111 in Atlanta on Dec. 8.

Trae Young led the Hawks with 30 points and nine assists, De’Andre Hunter scored 20 points, Vit Krejci added 14 points, Zaccharie Risacher finished with 13 and David Roddy 10 points.

Raptors 130, Nets 113

Scottie Barnes had 33 points and 13 rebounds and the Toronto Raptors ended an 11-game losing streak with a 130-113 victory over the visiting Brooklyn Nets on Wednesday night.

Toronto’s Immanuel Quickley (elbow) returned after missing 22 games and added 21 points and 15 assists. Grady Dick had 22 points and three steals; Ja’Kobe Walter scored 11 points; Jakob Poeltl had 12 points and nine rebounds; and Ochai Agbaji scored 14 points.

Brooklyn’s D’Angelo Russell, playing his first game since his acquisition in a



Knicks guard Josh Hart (3) hangs on the rim after a dunk against the Utah Jazz during Wednesday’s game in New York. VINCENT CARCHIETTA/MAGN IMAGES

trade with the Los Angeles Lakers, scored 22 points off the bench.

Cameron Johnson scored 24 points for the Nets, who have lost three in a row and five of six. Nic Claxton had 16 points and 10 rebounds; Keon Johnson scored 17 points; Jalen Wilson added 10 points; and Day’Ron Sharp scored 11.

Brooklyn led 33-26 after one quarter.

Heat 119, Pelicans 108

Tyler Herro scored 32 points to lead five Miami scorers in double figures and the host Heat defeated New Orleans.

Bam Adebayo added 23 points and 10 assists, Duncan Robinson scored 17, Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 12 and Kel’el Ware added 10 for the Heat. Jimmy Butler returned from a five-game absence due to a flu-like illness and finished with nine points in 25 minutes.

Guard Terry Rozier served a one-game suspension that he received for his role in a skirmish in the final minute of a 104-100 victory at Houston on Sunday.

Trey Murphy III scored 34 points – one off his season high – CJ McCollum added 22, Brandon Boston had 14 and Dejounte Murray added 12 to lead the NBA-worst Pelicans, who lost their 11th consecutive game and for the 20th time in 21 games.

Miami scored the first five points of the second half to take a 61-51 lead. McCollum made three consecutive Pelicans field goals to pull them within three points.

Rockets 110, Mavericks 99

Cam Whitmore scored 18 points off the bench and teamed with Alperen Sengun to lead a decisive second-quar-

ter run that helped Houston to a victory over visiting Dallas.

Sengun tallied 23 points, six rebounds, four assists and six steals as Houston rebounded after dropping the first two games of a five-game homestand. Momentum flipped in the second quarter when Whitmore and Sengun combined to score 20 points during a 23-4 run that turned a 10-point deficit into a 53-44 lead.

Jalen Green scored 22 points while Dillon Brooks added 19 points and six rebounds. The Rockets won without two key bench contributors: Tari Eason (leg) and Amen Thompson (suspension).

Klay Thompson posted 16 points and four 3-pointers for the Mavericks, while Kyrie Irving added 16 points, seven rebounds, three steals and two blocks. Already without their leading scorer, Luka Doncic (calf), the Mavericks lost P.J. Washington to a right knee sprain. He did not return for the second half.

The Mavericks were unable to maintain the momentum from their hot start. Houston erased an early 10-point deficit with a 12-2 run capped by a pair of free throws by Brooks, but Dallas reclaimed a 30-24 lead entering the second.

Wizards 125, Bulls 107

Jordan Poole scored 30 points to lead host Washington to a win over Chicago.

Poole made his return to the Wizards lineup after missing the two previous games with a hip injury. He shot 10 of 21 from the field in his return, making six 3-pointers.

Justin Champagnie added 15 points, while Carlton Carrington scored 11 points and made all three of his 3-point attempts to help push Washington to its third win in seven games. That wouldn’t

be a positive stretch for many teams, but the Wizards have won only six times this season, and they are less than a month removed from ending a 16-game losing streak that left them sitting at 2-18 through 20 games.

Chicago’s Zach Lavine led all scorers with 32 points on 12-of-20 shooting in the loss, while Coby White added 17 points and Nikola Vucevic contributed 12 points and 13 rebounds.

Kyshawn George buried a 3-pointer to stretch the Wizards’ lead to 16 points, 100-84, with 10:20 remaining. George pushed Washington’s lead to 20 points on a dunk shortly after, capping a 13-4 Wizards run that served to put the game out of reach early in the fourth quarter.

Pistons 105, Magic 96

Jaden Ivey scored 22 points before suffering a potentially serious left leg injury as host Detroit defeated Orlando.

Ivey was injured when Orlando’s Cole Anthony dove for a loose ball early in the fourth quarter and crashed into Ivey’s leg. He left the court on a stretcher.

Cade Cunningham contributed 19 points, nine assists and eight rebounds. Jalen Duren had 18 points and 11 rebounds, Tobias Harris supplied 17 points and eight rebounds, and Tim Hardaway Jr. tossed in 12 points for Detroit, which has won four of its last five games.

Jalen Suggs led the Magic with 24 points. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope had 21 points and Wendell Carter Jr. added 15 points and eight rebounds.

The Pistons shot 64.1 percent from the field in the first half and grabbed a 65-49 halftime lead. Ivey had 16 points and Cunningham scored 12 as they combined to make all seven of their 3-point attempts. Orlando was already down by eight points with 3:30 left in the half, and the Pistons added to the cushion finished with a 14-6 run.

Kings 113, 76ers 107

Clutch plays by Malik Monk capped a furious finish that allowed host Sacramento to overtake Joel Embiid-less Philadelphia for a win.

Monk was credited with a basket on a goaltended layup to break a tie with 33.8 seconds remaining. He stole the ball from Paul George seven seconds later, then teamed with DeMar DeRozan for four clinching free throws.

Sacramento scored the final 15 points of the game to pull out its second consecutive victory.

Playing the front end of a back-to-back set that will see them in action again Thursday against the Golden State Warriors in San Francisco, the 76ers opted to sit Embiid after he averaged 26.3 points during a four-game winning streak that ended Wednesday.

With George taking charge by scoring 30 points and Tyrese Maxey adding 27 in Embiid’s 20th absence this season, the 76ers were able to break from a 57-all halftime tie to lead for most of the second half.

They were up by as many as 10 in the final period and led 107-98 with just 3:34 remaining before the Kings did the rest of the game’s scoring.

WEDNESDAY’S BOX SCORES

Washington 125, Chicago 107				
CHICAGO (107)				
LaVine 12-20 5-7 32, Williams 3-6 0-0 7, Vucevic 5-17 0-0 12, Giddey 3-8 0-0 6, White 5-11 5-5 17, Ball 2-7 0-0 5, Terry 2-3 1-2 6, Horton-Tucker 3-5 0-0 7, Smith 1-6 0-0 3, Buzelis 2-5 0-0 5, Phillips 2-3 0-0 4, Carter 1-1 0-0 3. Totals 41-92 11-14 107.				
WASHINGTON (125)				
Champagnie 6-8 1-1 15, Cullibaly 0-1 0-0 0, Sarr 5-11 0-1 11, Carrington 4-5 0-0 11, Poole 10-21 4-4 30, Kispert 5-12 0-0 13, Brogdon 5-12 2-2 12, Valanciunas 6-12 2-3 14, Kuzma 2-3 1-1 5, George 4-10 0-0 9, Gill 1-2 0-0 3, Butler 0-0 0-0 0, Davis 0-10-0 0, Vukevic 1-1 0-0 2. Totals 49-99 10-12 125.				
CHI	25	26	29	27
WAS	27	28	36	34
3-Point Goals: Chicago 14-47 (The Vine 3-8, White 2-6, Vucevic 2-9, Carter 1-1, Horton-Tucker 1-2, Terry 1-2, Buzelis 1-3, Smith 1-4, Williams 1-4, Ball 1-6, Giddey 0-1, Phillips 0-1), Washington 17-36 (Poole 6-13, Carrington 3-3, Kispert 3-6, Champagnie 2-3, Gill 1-1, Sarr 1-2, George 1-6, Brogdon 0-1, Davis 0-1). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Chicago 44 (Vucevic 13), Washington 42 (Sarr 10). Assists: Chicago 28 (Vucevic), White 6, Washington 36 (Brogdon, Carrington, Valanciunas 6). Total Fouls: Chicago 13, Washington 13. A: 16,296 (20,308)				
New York 119, Utah 103				
UTAH (103)				
Juzang 3-6 2-2 10, Markkanen 6-22 3-3 16, Kessler 3-5 0-0 6, George 6-13 0-0 15, Sexton 10-13 1-1 25, Clarkson 8-19 6-9 25, Mykhailiuk 0-6 0-0 0, Sensabaugh 2-5 0-0 4, Filipowski 1-5 0-0 2, Collier 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 39-96 12-15 103.				
NEW YORK (119)				
Anunoby 10-16 1-3 22, Hart 6-12 2-3 15, Towns 10-20 8-9 31, Bridges 12-17 1-2 27, Payne 2-9 3-4 8, Achiuwa 5-8 1-2 12, Kolek 1-2 0-0 2, Shamet 1-1 0-0 2. Totals 47-85 16-23 119.				
UTA	25	21	33	24
NYK	24	32	31	32
3-Point Goals: Utah 13-43 (Sexton 4-4, Clarkson 3-6, George 3-7, Juzang 2-4, Markkanen 1-10, Kessler 0-1, Filipowski 0-1, Collier 0-2, Sensabaugh 0-3, Mykhailiuk 0-4), New York 9-23 (Towns 3-6, Bridges 2-5, Achiuwa 1-1, Payne 1-3, Anunoby 1-3, Hart 1-4, Kolek 0-1). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Utah 45 (Markkanen 10), New York 47 (Towns 21). Assists: Utah 23 (George 6), New York 31 (Hart 12). Total Fouls: Utah 19, New York 16. A: 19,812 (19,763)				

Toronto 130, Brooklyn 113				
BROOKLYN (113)				
Clowney 2-5 0-0 5, Johnson 7-12 7-7 24, Claxton 7-11 2-3 16, Johnson 6-18 2-2 17, Simmons 1-6 0-0 2, Wilson 3-11 3-3 10, Russell 9-13 2-2 22, Martin 1-4 0-0 2, Sharpe 5-6 1-1 11, Beekman 0-0 1-2 1, Lewis 1-1 0-0 3. Totals 42-87 18-20 113.				
TORONTO (130)				
Agbaji 5-8 2-2 14, Barnes 14-18 2-2 33, Poeltl 6-10 0-0 12, Dick 9-17 0-0 22, Quickley 7-16 4-4 21, Shead 3-7 1-3 7, Walter 4-6 1-2 11, Olynyk 3-3 0-0 7, Mitchell 0-1 0-0 0, Boucher 1-2 0-0 3, Battle 0-0 0-0 0, Mogbo 0-0 0-0 0, Chomche 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 52-88 10-13 130.				
BKN	33	31	27	22
TOR	26	39	29	36
3-Point Goals: Brooklyn 11-37 (Johnson 3-5, Johnson 3-12, Russell 3-6, Lewis 1-1, Clowney 1-4, Wilson 1-5, Claxton 0-1, Sharpe 0-1, Martin 0-2), Toronto 16-32 (Dick 4-8, Barnes 3-4, Quickley 3-7, Agbaji 2-2, Walter 2-4, Olynyk 1-1, Boucher 1-2, Mitchell 0-1, Shead 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Brooklyn 32 (Claxton 10), Toronto 39 (Barnes 13). Assists: Brooklyn 28 (Russell 8), Toronto 36 (Quickley 15). Total Fouls: Brooklyn 17, Toronto 20. A: 19,104 (19,800)				
Miami 119, New Orleans 108				
NEW ORLEANS (108)				
Jones 3-5 2-2 8, Murphy III 11-24 7-7 34, Missi 3-3 1-2 7, McCollum 9-16 3-5 22, Murray 5-13 2-12, Boston Jr. 5-7 4-4 14, Hawkins 3-9 0-0 8, Theis 0-1 0-0 0, Green 1-2 0-0 3. Totals 40-80 19-22 108.				
MIAMI (119)				
Butler 3-5 2-2 9, Highsmith 1-6 0-0 2, Adebayo 9-14 5-5 23, Herro 11-22 5-5 32, Robinson 7-13 0-0 17, Jovic 3-6 0-0 8, Jaquez Jr. 5-9 1-4 12, Burks 1-4 3-3 6, Ware 4-4 1-2 10. Totals 44-83 17-21 119.				
NOP	24	27	25	32
MIA	36	20	34	29
3-Point Goals: New Orleans 9-34 (Murphy III 5-15, Hawkins 2-5, Green 1-1, McCollum 1-5, Jones 0-1, Theis 0-1, Boston Jr. 0-1, Murray 0-5), Miami 14-34 (Herro 5-12, Robinson 3-7, Jovic 2-4, Jaquez Jr. 1-1, Ware 1-1, Butler 1-2, Burks 1-2, Adebayo 0-2, Highsmith 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: New Orleans 31 (Boston Jr., Hawkins, Jones, McCollum, Missi, Murphy III 4), Miami 38 (Adebayo 9). Assists: New Orleans 25 (Murray 7), Miami 34 (Adebayo 10). Total Fouls: New Orleans 15, Miami 16. A: 20,013 (19,600)				

Detroit 105, Orlando 96				
ORLANDO (96)				
Carter Jr. 7-15 1-2 15, da Silva 0-6 0-0 0, Bitadze 3-8 2-4 8, Caldwell-Pope 8-11 1-1 21, Suggs 9-20 3-4 24, Houston 1-4 0-0 3, Harris 2-5 0-0 4, Isaac 1-2 2-4 0, Howard 3-4 3-4 9, Anthony 3-12 2-3 8, Joseph 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 37-91 14-20 96.				
DETROIT (105)				
Hardaway Jr. 4-11 4-5 12, Harris 7-9 1-2 17, Duren 9-10 0-0 18, Cunningham 7-14 1-2 19, Ivey 8-11 1-2 22, Thompson 3-9 0-2 6, Beasley 0-7 2-2 2, Stewart 2-5 2-2 7, Holland 1-2 0-0 2, Sasser 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 41-79 11-17 105.				
ORL	21	28	26	21
DET	31	34	19	21
3-Point Goals: Orlando 8-35 (Caldwell-Pope 4-6, Suggs 3-9, Houston 1-4, Joseph 0-1, da Silva 0-1, Howard 0-1, Harris 0-2, Anthony 0-3, Isaac 0-4, Carter Jr. 0-4), Detroit 12-29 (Ivey 5-6, Cunningham 4-6, Harris 2-4, Stewart 1-2, Sasser 0-1, Thompson 0-2, Hardaway Jr. 0-4, Beasley 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Orlando 33 (Carter Jr. 8), Detroit 49 (Duren 11). Assists: Orlando 18 (Bitadze 6), Detroit 25 (Cunningham 9). Total Fouls: Orlando 21, Detroit 18. A: 19,399 (21,000)				
Houston 110, Dallas 99				
DALLAS (99)				
Thompson 6-11 0-0 16, Washington 3-8 0-0 6, Lively II 4-5 0-0 8, Dinwiddie 3-7 0-2 8, Irving 7-13 2-3 16, Kleber 2-4 0-0 5, Grimes 6-13 3-4 17, Hardy 4-6 1-5 11, Gafford 2-4 0-0 4, Powell 0-0 2-2 2, Prosper 3-3 0-0 6, Williams 0-0 0-0 0, Gortman 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 40-75 8-16 99.				
HOUSTON (110)				
Brooks 6-15 4-4 19, Smith Jr. 5-8 1-2 12, Sengun 9-16 5-8 23, Green 9-21 4-5 22, VanVleet 1-8 3-3 5, Whitmore 7-9 1-1 18, Tate 1-5 0-0 3, Holiday 2-4 0-0 4, Adams 2-3 0-0 4. Totals 42-89 18-23 110.				
DAL	30	22	23	24
HOU	24	37	28	21
3-Point Goals: Dallas 11-28 (Thompson 4-8, Hardy 2-3, Dinwiddie 2-4, Grimes 2-7, Kleber 1-2, Washington 0-1, Gortman 0-1, Irving 0-2), Houston 8-25 (Whitmore 3-4, Brooks 3-8, Tate 1-1, Smith Jr. 1-2, Sengun 0-1, Holiday 0-2, Green 0-3, VanVleet 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Dallas 38 (Irving 7), Houston 35 (Brooks, Sengun 6). Assists: Dallas 19 (Lively II 6), Houston 16 (VanVleet 7). Total Fouls: Dallas 20, Houston 18. A: 18,055 (18,023)				

Denver 139, Atlanta 120				
ATLANTA (120)				
Mathews 4-8 0-19, Risacher 6-12 0-0 13, Capela 2-4 0-2 4, Daniels 4-17 0-0 9, Young 8-17 10-12 30, Krejci 5-12 1-1 14, Hunter 7-14 3-5 20, Okongwu 4-6 0-0 9, Roddy 4-7 0-0 10, Barlow 1-3 0-0 2. Totals 45-100 14-21 120.				
DENVER (139)				
Braun 7-9 1-1 15, Porter Jr. 8-14 0-0 21, Jokic 8-16 6-6 23, Murray 6-14 7-7 21, Westbrook 5-6 5-5 16, Strawther 6-12 0-0 13, Watson 4-10 2-2 11, Jordan 4-4 0-0 8, Pickett 3-5 0-0 7, Tyson 0-0 0-0 0, Jones 1-2 0-0 2, Nnaji 1-2 0-0 2. Totals 53-94 21-21 139.				
ATL	33	38	24	25
DEN	40	34	41	24
3-Point Goals: Atlanta 16-46 (Young 4-10, Hunter 3-5, Krejci 3-8, Roddy 2-3, Okongwu 1-3, Mathews 1-4, Risacher 1-6, Daniels 1-7), Denver 12-30 (Porter Jr. 5-9, Murray 2-5, Jokic 1-1, Westbrook 1-2, Pickett 1-2, Watson 1-4, Strawther 1-5, Braun 0-1, Jones 0-1). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Atlanta 44 (Capela, Okongwu 7), Denver 43 (Jokic 17). Assists: Atlanta 34 (Young 9), Denver 44 (Jokic 15). Total Fouls: Atlanta 16, Denver 16. A: 19,902 (19,155)				
Sacramento 113, Philadelphia 107				
PHILADELPHIA (107)				
George 11-20 4-4 30, Martin 5-10 0-0 12, Yabusele 3-6 0-0 8, Lowry 0-3 0-0 0, Maxey 10-23 4-4 27, Gordon 5-9 1-1 14, Drummond 4-6 2-4 10, Jackson 1-3 0-0 3, Council IV 1-3 1-1 3, Edwards 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 40-84 12-14 107.				
SACRAMENTO (113)				
DeRozan 7-14 4-4 18, Ellis 3-8 0-0 9, Sabonis 8-14 1-2 17, Fox 13-16 7-8 35, Monk 5-12 10-10 20, Lyles 4-9 0-0 12, Huerter 1-8 0-0 2, McDermott 0-2 0-0 0, Len 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 42-24 11 23.				
PHI	30	27	32	18
SAC	25	32	23	33
3-Point Goals: Philadelphia 15-40 (George 4-7, Gordon 3-7, Maxey 3-10, Martin 2-4, Yabusele 2-5, Jackson 1-2, Council IV 0-1, Edwards 0-1, Lowry 0-3), Sacramento 9-31 (Lyles 4-8, Ellis 3-8, Fox 2-4, DeRozan 0-1, McDermott 0-2, Huerter 0-3, Monk 0-5). Fouled Out: Philadelphia (George). Rebounds: Philadelphia 34 (Drummond 9), Sacramento 45 (Sabonis 21). Assists: Philadelphia 24 (Maxey 6), Sacramento 24 (Sabonis 7). Total Fouls: Philadelphia 22, Sacramento 14. A: 16,024 (17,500)				



# GOLFTHISWEEK

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## PGA TOUR

### Season starts in Hawaii

And just like that, we're back. The PGA Tour returns to the main stage for the first time in 2025 this week with The Sentry at Kapalua's Plantation Course in Hawaii.

The field features 31 winners from last season and 29 players who finished inside the top 50 of the FedEx Cup standings. However, a few big names are missing, including Scottie Scheffler and Rory McIlroy. While McIlroy is expected to make his Tour debut at Pebble Beach, Scheffler was forced to withdraw from the field after a kitchen incident on Christmas. He received surgery on his right hand after being cut by broken glass, and he expects to be back in three to four weeks — it sounds like his first start of the year will be the American Express.

Thanks to its elevated status as a signature event, the purse at The Sentry is \$20 million, with \$3.6 million set aside for the winner.

### Golfers to keep an eye on

**Collin Morikawa:** He has turned into an auto-bet at The Sentry. Morikawa has found his groove at Kapalua, finishing inside the top 10 over his last five starts, including T-5 last season.

**Akshay Bhatia:** Tour players will tell you that the Plantation Course is a track you need to play a few times before you figure it out. Well, Bhatia made his Sentry debut last year and finished T-14. We've seen Bhatia a decent amount this winter, as he finished fourth at the Hero World Challenge and T-3 at the Grant Thornton Invitational. Yes, these are silly season events, but keeping the competitive juices flowing while most of your competitors practice at home is never a bad idea.

**Max Greyserman:** If you're unfamiliar with Greyserman, you ought to learn. He makes birdies in bunches, ranking 11th on Tour last season, and can go low as good as anyone, ranking fourth in scoring average. Kapalua demands four scores in the mid-60s, so Greyserman should feel right at home. He finished the season on a heater with four top-four finishes or better, including three runner-ups.

**Jake Knapp:** He ended the year with a win alongside Patty Tavatanakit at the Grant Thornton Invitational and the Plantation Course should fit his game perfectly.

— Riley Hamel

## LPGA TOUR

### Who was our Player of the Year?

Following a year in which 12 players were first-time winners on the LPGA, the stars showed up in 2024. It was a season that, for many reasons, will long be talked about. Six players won multiple titles in 2024. There was a breakout star and a number of veterans who made return trips to the winner's circle. On a tour in which a number of big names said they're either retiring or slowing down, the average age of the winners this season was 25.441.

Without further ado, here's the shortlist for Golfweek's Female Player of the Year:

**Honorable mention: Jeeno Thitikul** — No one in the history of the LPGA has made as much as Thitikul did in 2024. A \$4 million payday at the CME Group Tour Championship put Thitikul atop the money list with \$6,059,309. After sitting out the first quarter of the season with a thumb injury, the Thai player (who changed her name midseason) went on to win twice in 2024 in 17 starts. She led the tour in greens in regulation, putts per green in regulation and scoring (69.33), though she didn't meet the minimum number of required rounds to win the Vare Trophy.

**Honorable mention: Lydia Ko** — Ko described her 2024 season as a fairy-tale. It began with a victory at the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions and, after a brief lull, hit turbo gear with an emotional triumph at the Paris Olympics, which vaulted Ko into the LPGA Hall of Fame. But the 27-year-old didn't stop there, winning her third career major just two weeks later at the AIG Women's British Open at St. Andrews.

**Female Player of the Year: Nelly Korda** — It was a season for the history books. Both long-awaited and unpredictable, Korda's seven titles put her in rare air, joining Kathy Whitworth (1973), Nancy Lopez (1978, 1979) and Beth Daniel (1990) as the only Americans to do it since 1970. She collected her second career major at the Chevron Championship, winning five in a row in the first half of the season. There were snags along the way, including that 10 on a par 3 at the U.S. Women's Open, a dog bite in Seattle, final-round heartbreaks in Paris and St. Andrews and a neck injury that forced a two-month break late in the season. Korda persevered through it all, however, giving her tight-knit team praise every step of the way.

— Beth Ann Nichols

## COLLEGE/AMATEUR

### Some of 2024's best moments

The year 2024 just ended, and we're taking a look back on the year that was. Here's a recap of a dozen of the best moments from college and amateur golf this year:

**Auburn wins first title:** The Tigers captured their first national championship in school history in a thrilling match against Florida State.

**Rianne Malixi makes history:** Talk about a breakout year. Malixi won both the U.S. Girls' Junior and the U.S. Women's Amateur.

**Koivun's emergence:** Koivun had a dominant freshman season for Auburn, winning the Haskins Award.

**Koo's dominance:** The breakout player in the fall season was USC freshman Jasmine Koo, who won three times and is the early favorite for the Annika Award.

**Is Clanton the future?** Clanton had a dominant summer on the PGA Tour, and he's on the verge of earning his Tour card because of it.

**Woad's reign:** Woad was one of the best female amateurs in the world in 2024, her crowning moment coming when she won the Augusta National Women's Amateur.

**Alabama facility sets new bar:** How far has college golf come in recent years? Well, Alabama spent \$47 million on its practice facility.

**Jimmy Ellis crazy U.S. Am run:** One of the best stories of the U.S. Amateur, Jimmy Ellis shot 61 and won medalist honors at Hazeltine.

**Stanford women win (again):** The Stanford women's golf team continued its dominance, winning its second title in three years.

**Neal Shipley's major memories:** Shipley joined an exclusive list of amateurs to earn low am honors at both the Masters and U.S. Open.

**Adela Cernousek breaks through:** A breakout year for Cernousek got going when she won the NCAA individual title in May.

**NGI continues to grow:** The National Golf Invitational, the NIT of college golf, was special in its second year, and it's only going to grow in 2025.

— Cameron Jourdan



Xander Schauffele plays his shot from the first fairway during the final round of the Tour Championship on Sept. 1. JOHN DAVID MERCER/USA TODAY SPORTS

## Sentry

Continued from Page 1

He did not rest on his laurels during his offseason, saying his wedge play and short game, particularly around the greens, needed work.

"My wedge play sucked," he said. "It was really bad. Really, really bad. Golf is tough. ... It's something I'm trying to work on, still working on it now, still trying to figure it out, get the right feel for it."

Schauffele will play the first two rounds with Wyndham Clark and Sweden's Ludvig Aberg. Other notables in the field include Collin Morikawa, Patrick Cantlay, Will Zalatoris, Tony Finau, Max Homa and Justin Thomas.

Norway's Viktor Hovland said he will try to play after a freak accident of his own. He explained to a golf website in

his home country that he broke his right little toe getting out of his hotel bed in the middle of the night. As of Wednesday, Hovland was still officially in the field.

There were 15 first-time winners last season who are in this week's field, including some up-and-comers like 2024 Rookie of the Year Nick Dunlap, who became the first amateur to win on tour since Phil Mickelson (1991) when he prevailed at The American Express last January.

Dunlap, who played at the University of Alabama at the time, turned pro and went on to add a second victory at the Barracuda Championship.

"Huge," Dunlap, 21, said of his second win. "Not only to just validate that first win a little bit, but also for (qualifying for) the playoffs as well."

Chris Kirk is the defending champion. Thomas won The Sentry in 2017 and 2020, and Schauffele did so in 2019.

## McNealy leans on brother for more than caddying

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Maverick McNealy didn't earn his first PGA Tour win until his youngest brother, Scout, started toting his bag.

It turns out McNealy's brother is good for more than just caddying, as Maverick revealed that Scout officiated his wedding back in 2023.

"Maya and I got married last Dec. 6," Maverick McNealy said Tuesday ahead of The Sentry this week in Kapalua, Hawaii. "It was just the two of us, our parents, photographer and officiant. We decided we wanted to get married before we could plan a party. Planned the party for the one-year anniversary. And had — actually Scout officiated, which was cool."

So it's a family affair as Maverick McNealy embarks on the 2025 PGA Tour campaign with the limited-field season opener beginning on Thursday.

Maverick McNealy only qualified for this event by winning the RSM Classic by one stroke in November. The victory came just a few months after Scout McNealy, the youngest of four brothers, began working as Maverick's caddie.

"Well, for one, Scout was right in between jobs, the timing worked out perfect," Maverick McNealy explained Tuesday. "And ... he's kind of the brother I go to with golf stuff. I'm the oldest of

four. If I really want to get in deep philosophical challenging intellectual questions I go to Colt. If it's family stuff, kind of more of the intuitive side, it's Dakota. If it's golf, it's Scout. He's probably the best player out of the four of us and had some shoulder injuries and played high-level collegiate golf, and so that's probably why I went with him."

Maverick McNealy said his wife and brother challenged him when he would complain how difficult it was to win on the PGA Tour.

"I just felt like the progression is you get your (PGA Tour) card, you keep your card, you start making a bunch of cuts, and then you start finishing in the top 10, start playing in the final group, couple chances to win and then you win," he said. "(Scout) says, 'There's no reason why you can't win any given week.' I tend to think pretty linearly, and he's just like, 'Just go set your sights high.'"

Now up to No. 30 in the world rankings, Maverick McNealy gets to play The Sentry for the first time thanks to his RSM Classic victory.

"It's the first time I've done it, and definitely hope it's not the last," Maverick McNealy said. "Everyone who has ever told me about this tournament says, 'Once you play here once you're never going to want to miss it.' And I can see why, it's pretty awesome."



Maverick McNealy, left, and his caddie Scout McNealy pose with the trophy after winning the RSM Classic on Nov. 24. KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES





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Odds available as of print deadline.

NFL				
FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG	
BALTIMORE	17.5	42	Cleveland	
Cincinnati	1.5	48.5	PITTSBURGH	
Sunday				
FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG	
ATLANTA	8.5	48	Carolina	
Washington	4.5	44	DALLAS	
GREEN BAY	9	40.5	Chicago	
INDIANAPOLIS	5	45.5	Jacksonville	
Buffalo	3	38	NEW ENGLND	
PHILADELPHIA	3	38.5	NY Giants	
TAMPA BAY	13	43.5	New Orleans	
ARIZONA	3	44	San Francisco	
DENVER	10	39	Kansas City	
Seattle	4	39.5	LA RAMS	
LA Chargers	5.5	41	LAS VEGAS	
Miami	1.5	39.5	NY JETS	
DETROIT	2.5	57.5	Minnesota	
COLLEGE FOOTBALL				
FAVORITE	Thursday	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
OLE MISS	17.5	51.5		Duke
Friday				
FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG	
TEXAS ST.	13.5	61	North Texas	
Minnesota	8	42.5	VA. TECH	
Saturday				
FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG	
Buffalo	2.5	51	LIBERTY	
Monday				
FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG	
MONTANA ST.	3.5	56.5	North Dakota St.	
All times Eastern				

NFL				
American Conference				
East	W	L	T	Pct
Buffalo	13	3	0	.813
Miami	8	8	0	.500
NY Jets	4	12	0	.250
New England	3	13	0	.188
North	W	L	T	Pct
Baltimore	11	5	0	.688
Pittsburgh	10	6	0	.625
Cincinnati	8	8	0	.500

NFL				
National Conference				
East	W	L	T	Pct
Philadelphia	13	3	0	.813
Washington	11	5	0	.688
Dallas	7	9	0	.438
NY Giants	3	13	0	.188
West	W	L	T	Pct
Kansas City	10	6	0	.625
LA Chargers	9	7	0	.563
Denver	4	12	0	.250
Las Vegas	4	12	0	.250

NFL					
Pacific Division					
W	L	T	Pct	GB	
L.A. Clippers	19	14		.576	—
L.A. Lakers	18	14		.563	½
Golden State	16	16		.500	2½
Phoenix	15	17		.469	3½
Sacramento	15	19		.441	4½
Wednesday's Scores					
Washington 125,	Chicago 107				
Detroit 105,	Orlando 96				
Toronto 130,	Brooklyn 113				
Miami 119,	New Orleans 108				
N.Y. Knicks 119,	Utah 103				
Houston 110,	Dallas 99				
Denver 139,	Atlanta 120				
Sacramento 113,	Philadelphia 107				
Thursday's Games					
Indiana at Miami,	7:30 p.m.				
Boston at Minnesota,	7:30 p.m.				
Brooklyn at Milwaukee,	8 p.m.				
L.A. Clippers at Oklahoma City,	8 p.m.				
Philadelphia at Golden State,	10 p.m.				
Portland at L.A. Lakers,	10:30 p.m.				
Friday's Games					
Charlotte at Detroit,	7 p.m.				
Orlando at Toronto,	7:30 p.m.				
Boston at Houston,	8 p.m.				
Washington at New Orleans,	8 p.m.				
N.Y. Knicks at Oklahoma City,	8 p.m.				
Cleveland at Dallas,	8:30 p.m.				
San Antonio at Denver,	9 p.m.				
Memphis at Sacramento,	10 p.m.				
Atlanta at L.A. Lakers,	10:30 p.m.				

NHL				
Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
W	L	OT	Pts	GF
Toronto	23	13	2	48
Florida	23	13	2	48
Boston	20	15	4	44
Tampa Bay	20	12	2	42
Ottawa	19	15	2	40
Montreal	17	17	3	37
Detroit	15	18	4	34
Buffalo	14	20	4	32
Metropolitan Division				
W	L	OT	Pts	GF
Washington	25	10	2	52
New Jersey	24	14	3	51
Carolina	22	13	2	46
Pittsburgh	17	17	5	39
Columbus	16	16	6	38
Philadelphia	17	17	4	38
N.Y. Islanders	14	17	7	35
N.Y. Rangers	16	19	1	33
Western Conference				
Central Division				
W	L	OT	Pts	GF
Winnipeg	27	11	1	55
Minnesota	23	11	4	50
Colorado	23	15	0	46
Dallas	22	13	1	45
St. Louis	18	17	4	40
Utah	16	15	6	38
Nashville	11	20	7	29
Chicago	12	24	2	26
Pacific Division				
W	L	OT	Pts	GF
Vegas	25	9	3	53
L.A. Kings	22	10	5	49
Edmonton	22	12	3	47
Calgary	18	12	7	43
Vancouver	17	11	8	42
Seattle	17	19	2	36
Anaheim	15	17	4	34
San Jose	11	23	6	28
NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.				
Wednesday's Score				
L.A. Kings 3,	New Jersey 0			
Thursday's Games				
Minnesota at Washington,	7 p.m.			
Boston at N.Y. Rangers,	7 p.m.			
Carolina at Florida,	7 p.m.			
Detroit at Columbus,	7 p.m.			
Toronto at N.Y. Islanders,	7:30 p.m.			
Atlanta at Dallas,	8 p.m.			
Anaheim at Winnipeg,	8 p.m.			
Buffalo at Colorado,	9 p.m.			
Utah at Calgary,	9 p.m.			
Philadelphia at Vegas,	10 p.m.			
Vancouver at Seattle,	10 p.m.			
Tampa Bay at San Jose,	10:30 p.m.			
Friday's Games				
Pittsburgh at Florida,	7 p.m.			

Montreal at Chicago, 8 p.m.  
Ottawa at St. Louis, 8 p.m.  
Anaheim at Edmonton, 9 p.m.  
Nashville at Vancouver, 10 p.m.

**COLLEGE FOOTBALL**

**College Football Playoff Matchups**

**Quarterfinals**

Fiesta Bowl: No. 6 Penn State 31, No. 3 Boise State 14  
Peach Bowl: No. 5 Texas 39, No. 4 Arizona State 31, 2 OT  
Sugar Bowl: No. 2 Georgia vs. No. 7 Notre Dame, Jan. 2, 4 p.m.  
Rose Bowl: No. 8 Ohio State 41, No. 1 Oregon 21

**Bowl Schedule**

**Tuesday, Dec. 31**

ReliaQuest Bowl: Michigan 19, Alabama 13  
Tony the Tiger Sun Bowl: Louisville 35, Washington 34  
Cheez-It Citrus Bowl: Illinois 21, South Carolina 17  
Kinders Texas Bowl: LSU 44, Baylor 31

**Thursday, Jan. 2**

Taxslayer Gator Bowl: Duke vs Ole Miss at Jacksonville, 7:30 p.m.

**Friday, Jan. 3**

SERVPRO First Responder Bowl: North Texas vs Texas State at Dallas, 4 p.m.  
Duke's Mayo Bowl: Minnesota vs Virginia Tech at Charlotte, 7:30 p.m.

ULM at Georgia Southern, 7 p.m.  
South Alabama at Georgia State, 7 p.m.  
Hampton at Charleston, 7 p.m.  
FGCU at West Georgia, 7 p.m.  
Memphis at Florida Atlantic, 7 p.m.  
Middle Tennessee at FIU, 7 p.m.  
Illinois State at Murray State, 8 p.m.  
Eastn Kentucky at Central Ark., 8:30 p.m.  
SE Missouri St. at Tennessee St., 8:30 p.m.  
Southern Indiana at Tenn. Tech, 8:30 p.m.  
Little Rock at UT Martin, 8:30 p.m.

**Midwest**

Robert Morris at Detroit, 7 p.m.  
Milwaukee at Oakland, 7 p.m.  
Green Bay at Wright State, 7 p.m.  
Omaha at North Dakota, 8 p.m.  
St. Thomas (MN) at N.D. State, 8 p.m.  
South Dakota at Kansas City, 8 p.m.  
Purdue at Minnesota, 8 p.m.  
Lindenwood at Eastern Illinois, 8:30 p.m.  
Rutgers at Indiana, 8:30 p.m.  
Western Illinois at SIUE, 9 p.m.  
Denver at South Dakota State, 9 p.m.

**West**

Idaho State at Northern Arizona, 8 p.m.  
Weber State at Northern Colorado, 8 p.m.  
UC Irvine at Cal Poly, 8 p.m.  
Montana at Eastern Washington, 9 p.m.  
Montana State at Idaho, 9 p.m.  
Sam Houston at New Mexico State, 9 p.m.  
Louisiana Tech at UTEP, 9 p.m.  
Portland vs Gonzaga at Spokane, 9 p.m.  
UC Davis at Bakersfield, 9:30 p.m.  
Maryland at Washington, 9:30 p.m.  
Oregon St. at Loyola Marymount, 10 p.m.  
CSUN at Cal State Fullerton, 10 p.m.  
UC Riverside at Long Beach State, 10 p.m.  
San Francisco at Pacific, 10 p.m.  
Pepperdine at Saint Mary's, 10 p.m.  
Santa Clara at San Diego, 10 p.m.  
Illinois at Oregon, 10 p.m.

**USA TODAY Sports Coaches Poll**

**Dec. 30**

The USA TODAY Sports Men's Basketball Coaches Poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen in consultation with the National Association of Basketball Coaches. The voters represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parentheses

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. Tennessee (20)	12-0	764	1
2. Auburn (11)	11-1	747	2
3. Iowa State	10-1	707	3
4. Duke	10-2	664	4
5. Florida	13-0	651	5
6. Alabama	11-2	626	6
7. Kansas	9-2	552	7
8. Marquette	11-2	539	8
9. Oregon	12-1	491	9
10. Oklahoma	13-0	437	11
11. Kentucky	10-2	428	10
12. Texas A&M	11-2	424	13
13. UConn	10-3	416	14
14. Houston	8-3	386	12
15. Michigan St.	10-2	270	18
16. Mississippi St.	11-1	267	19
17. Cincinnati	11-2	259	17
18. UCLA	11-2	255	21
19. Gonzaga	9-4	170	15
20. Illinois	9-3	129	22
21. Baylor	8-3	113	23
22. Purdue	9-4	108	25
23. Ole Miss	11-2	92	16
24. Maryland	11-2	90	NR
25. Memphis	10-3	87	NR

**Others receiving votes:** St. John's 70; Arkansas 58; Drake 53; Michigan 49; Utah State 42; Georgia 36; San Diego State 30; Dayton 19; Texas Tech 12; Pittsburgh 10; Clemson 9; West Virginia 8; Missouri 6; North Carolina 1.

**USA TODAY Sports Women's Coaches Poll**

**Dec. 31**

The USA TODAY Sports women's basketball coaches poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association.

The members represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parentheses.

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. UCLA (31)	13-0	775	1
2. South Carolina	12-1	741	2
3. Notre Dame	11-2	678	4
4. LSU	15-0	677	3
5. USC	12-1	659	5
6. Texas	13-1	621	6
7. Maryland	12-0	572	8
8. UConn	11-2	559	7
9. Ohio State	13-0	526	9
10. Oklahoma	12-1	498	10
11. Kansas State	13-1	461	11
12. TCU	13-1	431	12
13. Tennessee	12-0	384	13
14. Georgia Tech	14-0	355	16
15. Duke	10-3	344	14
16. Kentucky	11-1	319	15
17. North Carolina	13-2	284	17
18. West Virginia	10-2	229	18
19. N.C. State	10-3	181	20
20. Alabama	13-1	178	21
21. Michigan State	11-2	161	19
22. Iowa	11-2	118	22
23. California	13-1	95	24
24. Baylor	11-2	87	23
25. Ole Miss	9-3	27	NR

**Others receiving votes:** Mississippi State 25, Utah 23, Vanderbilt 23, Michigan 15, Illinois 13, Florida State 11, George Mason 4, Nebraska 1

**TRANSACTIONS**

**Wednesday's Transactions**

**BASEBALL**

**Major League Baseball**

CHICAGO WHITE SOX – Braden Shewmake Designated for Assignment. Tyler Gilbert Traded for RHP Aaron Combs.  
PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES – Tyler Gilbert Traded to Chicago White Sox for RHP Aaron Combs.

**FOOTBALL**

**National Football League**

ARIZONA CARDINALS – RB Michael Carter Activated from the Practice Squad. RB James Conner Placed on IR knee.  
CAROLINA PANTHERS – G Jack Anderson practice squad addition to Dallas Cowboys.  
DALLAS COWBOYS – G Braeden Daniels Activated from the Practice Squad to Miami Dolphins. G Jack Anderson practice squad addition. CB Luq Barcoo practice squad addition. DE Earnest Brown IV signed.  
DETROIT LIONS – S Jamal Adams practice squad deletion.  
LAS VEGAS RAIDERS – G Jake Johannng cut.  
LOS ANGELES CHARGERS – CB Elijah Molden Placed on IR broken fibula.  
MIAMI DOLPHINS – G Braeden Daniels Activated from the Practice Squad. T Kendall Lamm Placed on IR back.  
NEW YORK GIANTS – T Garret Greenfield practice squad addition to Tampa Bay Buccaneers.  
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES – TE C.J. Uzomah Placed on IR undischosed.  
PITTSBURGH STEELERS – CB Luq Barcoo practice squad addition to Dallas Cowboys.  
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS – T Max Pircher practice squad addition to Washington Commanders.  
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS – DE Earnest Brown IV signed to Dallas Cowboys. T Garret Greenfield practice squad addition.  
TENNESSEE TITANS – K Matthew Wright practice squad addition.  
WASHINGTON COMMANDERS – DT Hagai Ndubuisi Activated from the Practice Squad International Player Pathway Program. T Max Pircher practice squad addition.

TENNIS ROUNDUP

# Americans advance to semis at United Cup

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

The United States swept China in Perth on Wednesday to punch their ticket to the semifinals of the United Cup in Australia.

No. 4-ranked Taylor Fritz recorded a 6-4, 6-4 win over China's Zhizhen Zhang and Coco Gauff scored a 7-6 (4), 6-2 victory over Shuai Zhang in singles. The Americans completed the sweep after Desirae Krawczyk and Robert Galloway posted a 6-3, 6-7 (1), 10-3 win in mixed doubles over Zhang and Fajing Sun.

The United States joined Kazakhstan in the semis where it will face either Italy or Czechnia.

Elena Rybakina breezed to victory and Alexander Shevchenko logged a three-set win to highlight Kazakhstan's 2-1 victory over Germany.

Also, Katie Boulter secured a 6-2, 6-1 win over Australia's Olivia Gadecki to propel Great Britain into the quarterfinals

Brisbane International

Second-seeded Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria fired 12 aces en route to a 6-2, 7-6 (5) win over Aussie Aleksandar Vukic in a second-round match in Australia.

Eighth-seeded Jordan Thompson won 76 percent of his first-serve points and saved six of seven break points in a 7-5, 6-3 win over Alex Michelsen.

Czech Jiri Lehecka posted a 6-2, 6-7 (5), 6-4 win over Japan's Yoshihito



Coco Gauff hits a return to Gao Xinyu during their women's single match at the United Cup on Wednesday in Perth, Australia. COLIN MURTY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Nishioka and Chile's Nicolas Jarry cruised to a 6-2, 6-3 victory over Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi.

Hong Kong Open

Japan's Kei Nishikori rallied to reach the quarterfinals with a 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 win over third-seeded Karen Khachanov of Russia.

Nishikori overcame seven aces by

Khachanov and benefited from five double faults from his foe to win the match in 2 hours, 9 minutes.

Fourth-seeded Arthur Fils of France fired six aces in his 7-6 (7), 6-4 win over Zizou Bergs of Belgium.

Women  
Brisbane International

Home favorite Kimberly Birrell post-

ed a 7-5, 7-5 second-round upset of No. 2 seed Emma Navarro.

Birrell saved six of 10 break points while overcoming a 4-3 deficit in the first set and a 4-2 deficit in the second set, completing the victory in just over 2 hours.

She will face Russia's Anastasia Potapova, a 7-5, 6-4 winner against No. 16 seed Dayana Yastremska of Ukraine.

No. 3 Daria Kasatkina of Russia outlasted Peyton Stearns 7-6 (7), 4-6, 7-5. No. 10 Victoria Azarenka of Belarus and No. 12 Linda Noskova of the Czech Republic also advanced on a day that saw No. 9 Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine, No. 11 Magdalena Frech of Poland and No. 13 Liudmila Samsonova of Russia eliminated.

ASB Classic

Seventh-seeded Naomi Osaka of Japan moved to the quarterfinals with a 7-5, 6-3 win over Austria's Julia Grabher in Auckland, New Zealand.

Osaka struck five aces and saved both break points during the 85-minute match. The four-time Grand Slam winner reached the final eight in her only previous appearance at the tournament in 2017.

No. 5 seed Clara Tauson of Denmark rallied for a 4-6, 7-6 (7), 7-6 (3) win over Sofia Kenin in 2 hours and 39 minutes. No. 8 Katie Volynets converted six of nine break points in a 6-4, 6-3 defeat of Ann Li.